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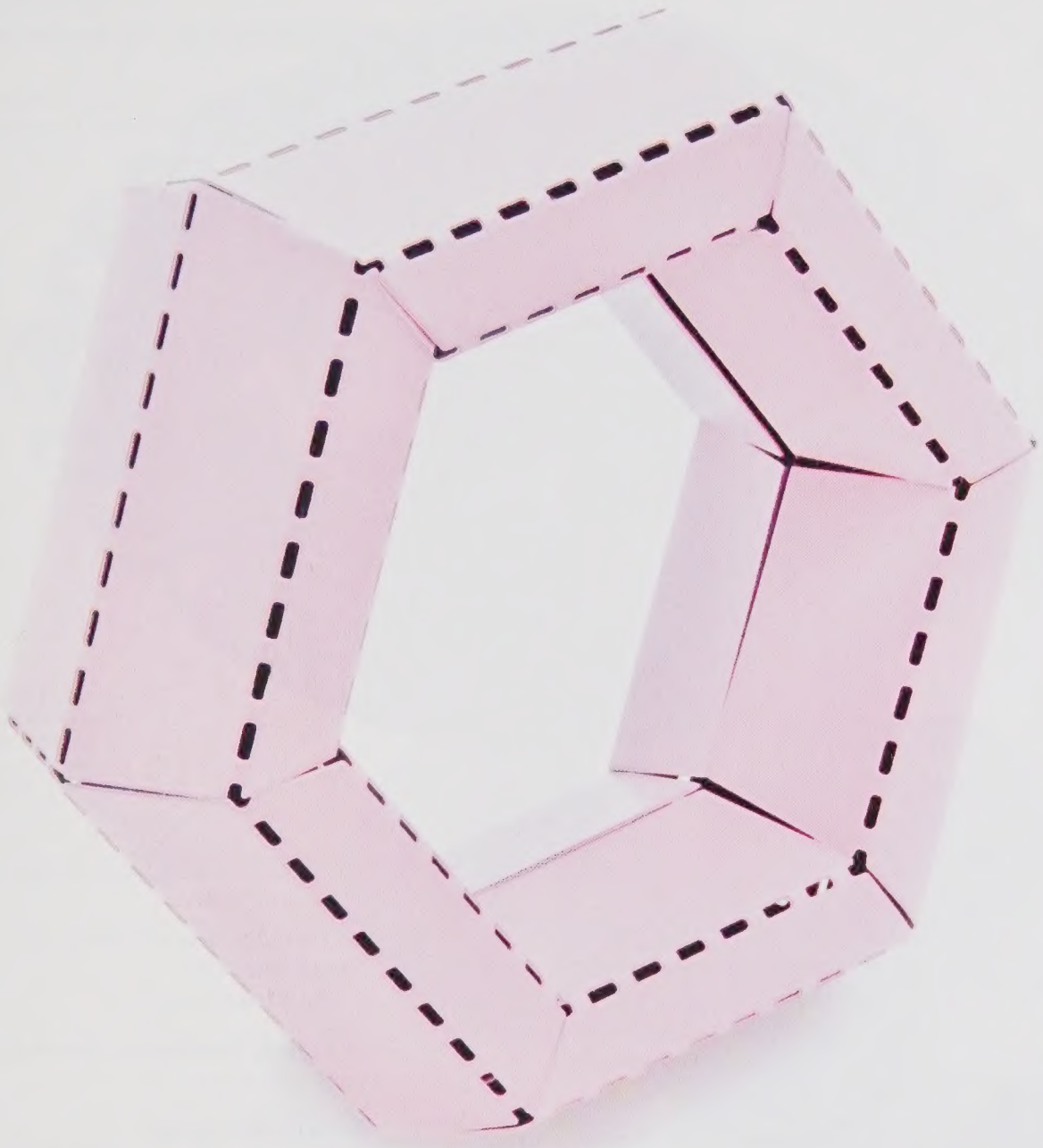

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Above: Arthur Hash, *FOLDUP Bracelet*, 2009. Steel, mixed media.

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WE MUST ALL come to terms with loss and death, as loved ones, pets, and possessions pass away. In the face of such loss, we each find ways of coping. Some of us write eulogies; some make quilts. Others create jewelry. The potent link between death and the metal arts is a recurring theme in this issue of *Metalsmith*, and offers an occasion to reflect on diverse forms of mourning.

In the cover story, "Objects of Remembrance: Contemporary Mourning Jewelry," author Marjorie Simon explains that jewelry has the power to silently communicate our loss to others, and further to "symbolize to the bereaved, intimately and directly on the body, the presence of the deceased." Jewelry has served this role for centuries, and continues to mediate the grief of both those who make and wear it.

The work of Australian jeweler Margaret West is also engaged with the subject of mourning. West's 2004 *Fatal Flowers* series of stone brooches focuses on the suffering and casualties of present-day war. "Now flesh has become stone," describes West, "stone that has been cut, abraded, fractured, bruised, burnt. Now, even the stones are bleeding."

The recently deceased Kurt Matzdorf, an integral figure in the field, is remembered in our "In Memoriam" department. Among those who pay tribute to this master metalsmith, jeweler and former Matzdorf student Lisa Gralnick states, "There are several generations of metalsmiths who owe their careers to Kurt Matzdorf, and we are testament to the enduring significance of his life's work." This sentiment is echoed by John Cogswell, as he writes of Matzdorf's strong sense of history: "He tried to make all of us who studied under him understand that we are all links in a living chain that stretches from antiquity into the future."

"You can't take it with you," as the saying goes, and in the end, it is what we leave behind that matters most. And for those remaining after the dead depart, there is solace in tangible things, like jewelry, or other containers of memory.... ●

SUZANNE RAMLJAK
EDITOR

metalsmith

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The mission of *Metalsmith* magazine is to document, analyze and promote excellence in jewelry and metalworking. In fulfillment of the goal of producing a significant document of the field, editorial content will emphasize contemporary activities and ideas, with supportive content to include relevant historical work and critical issues.

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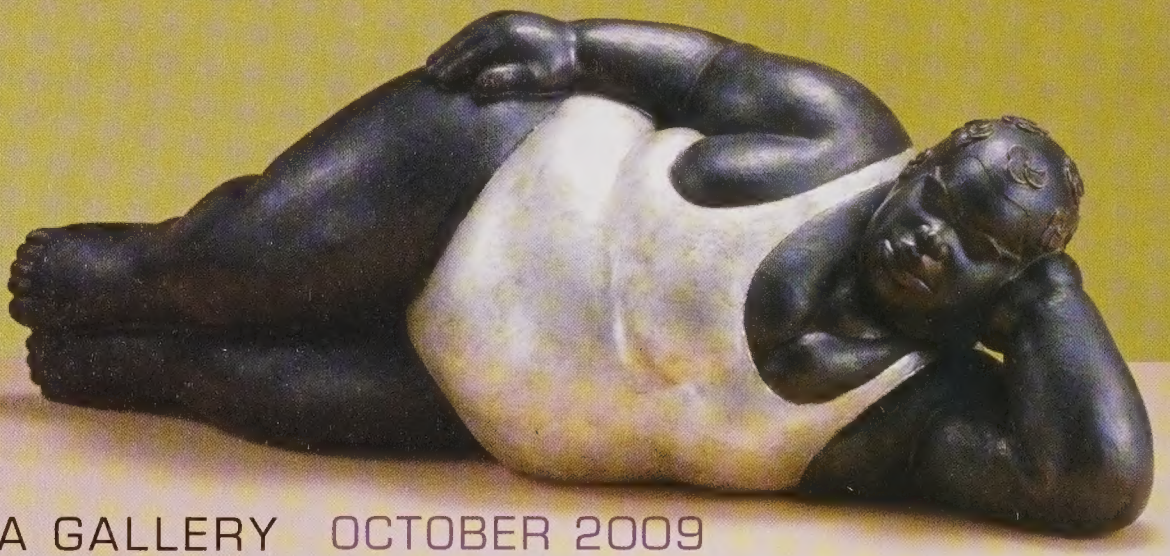

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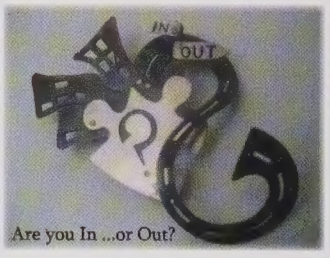

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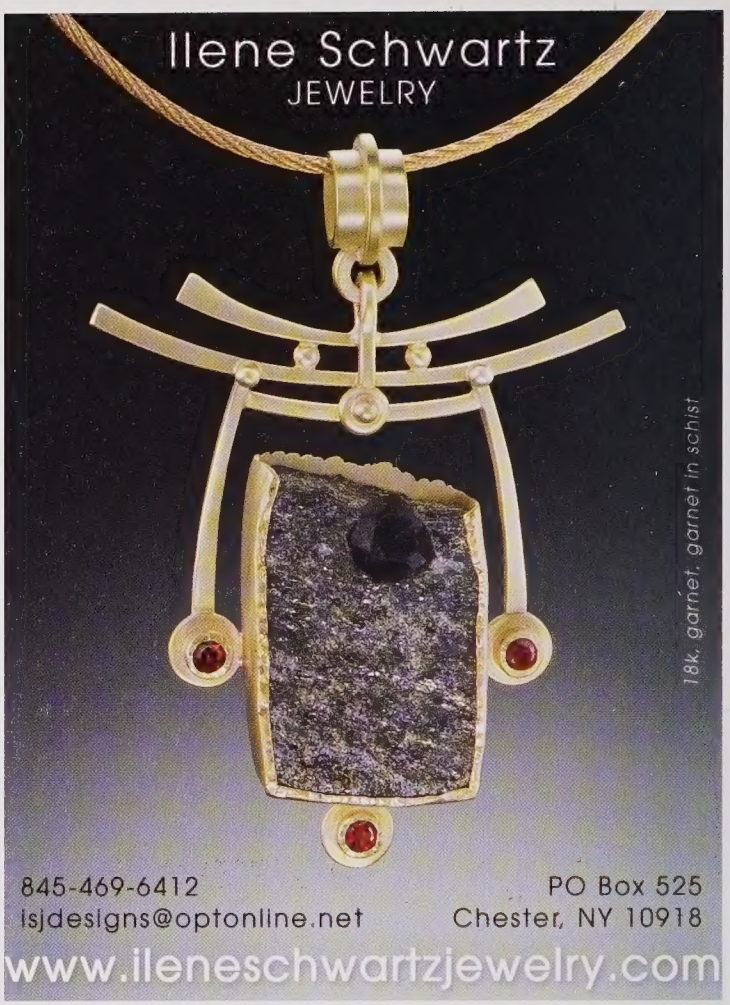

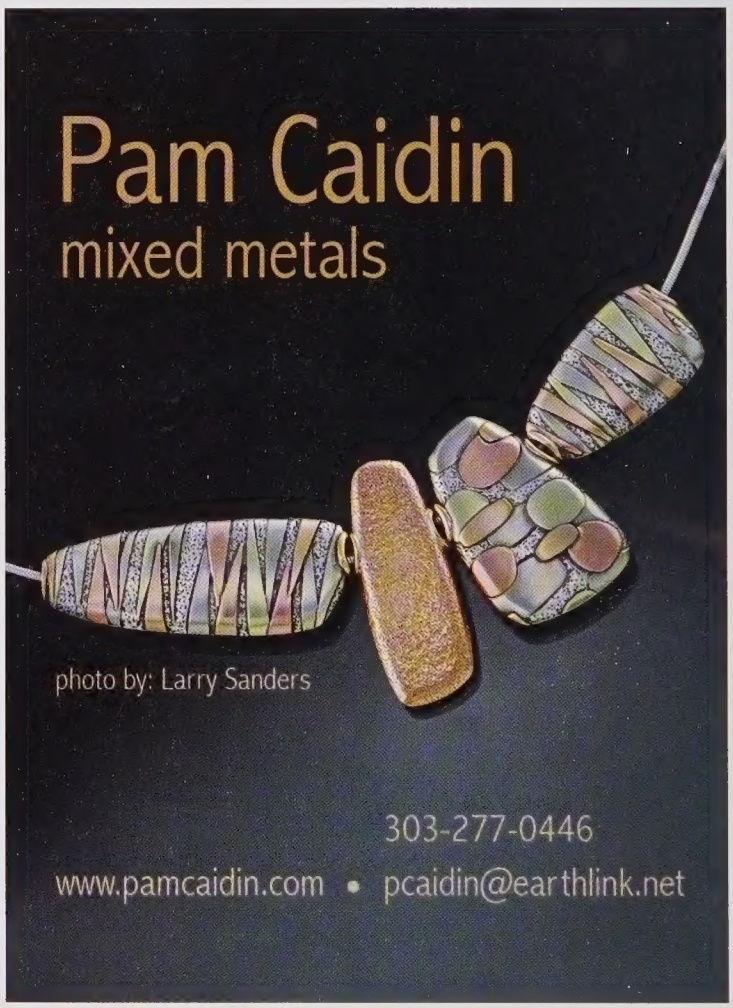

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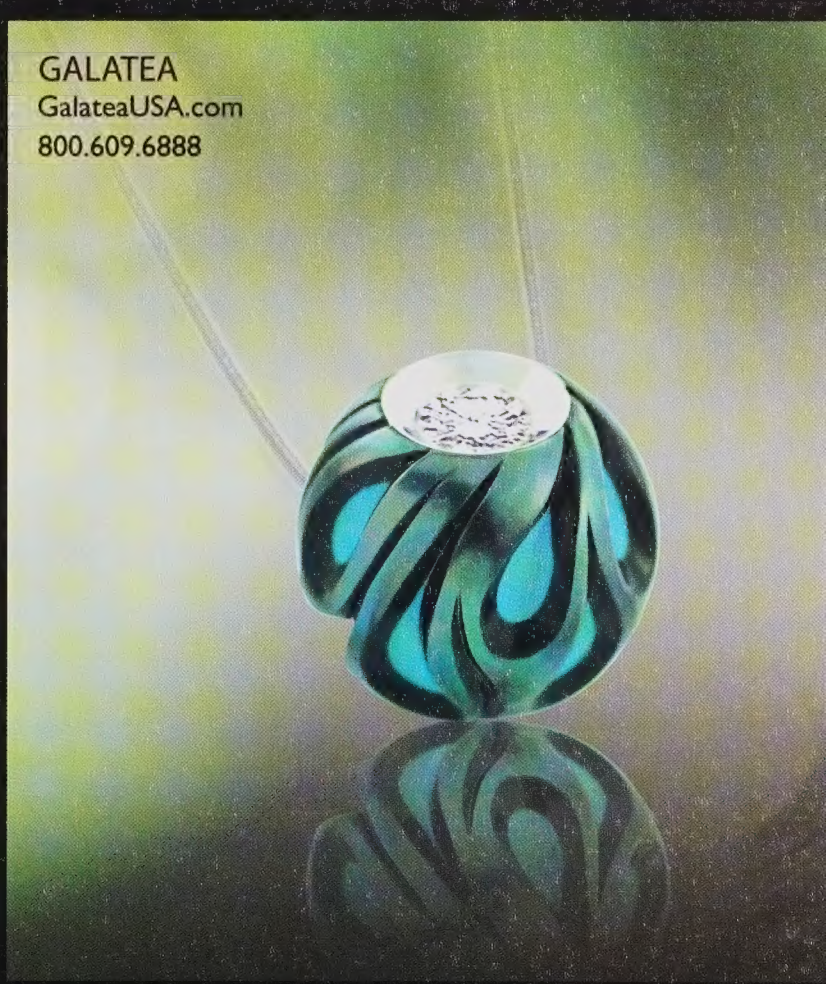

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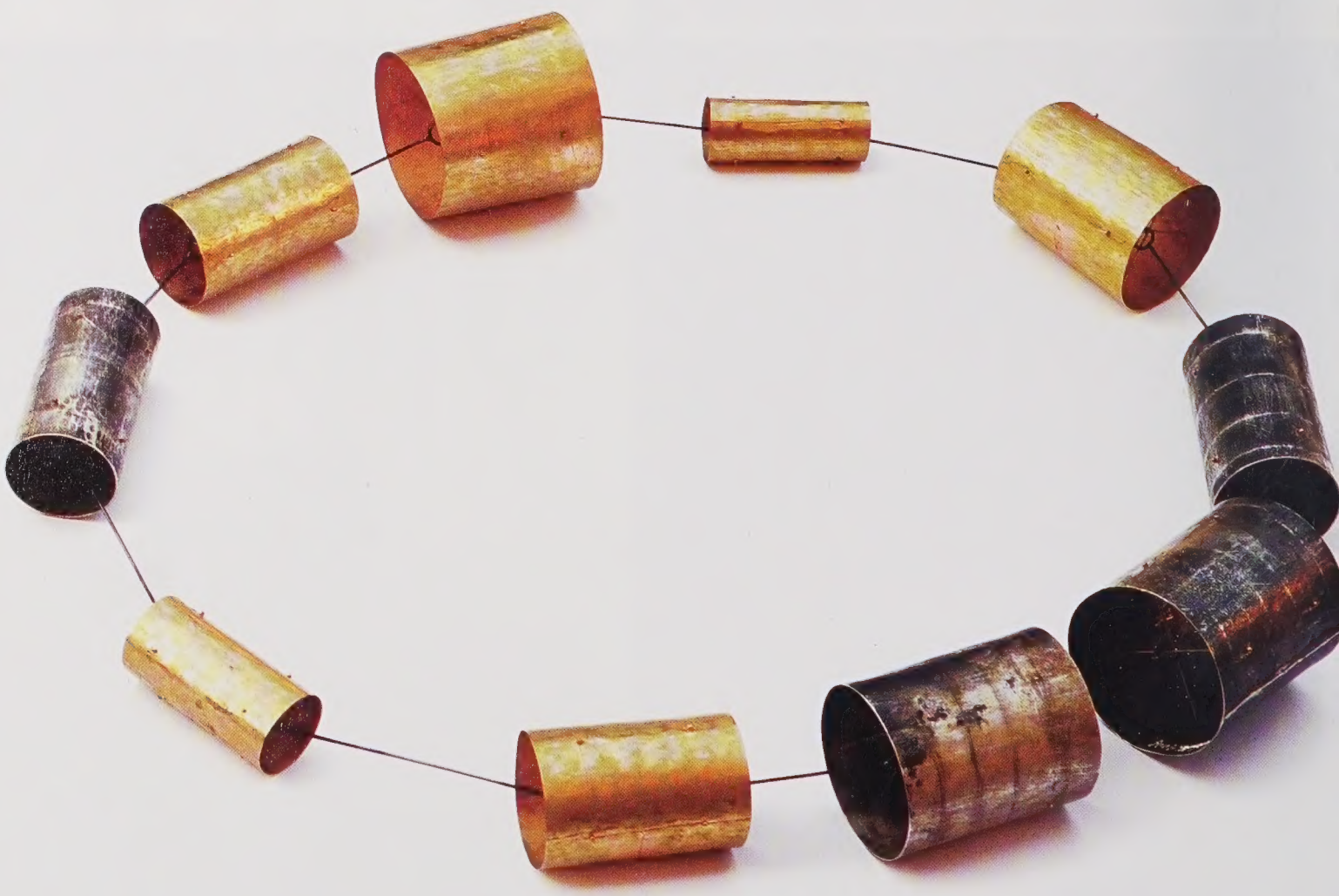

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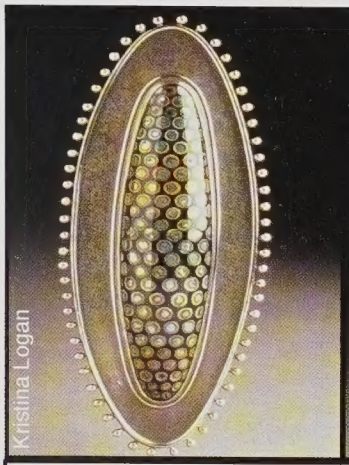
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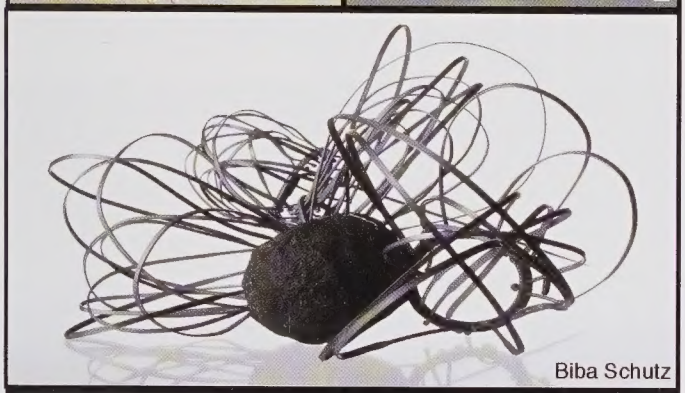
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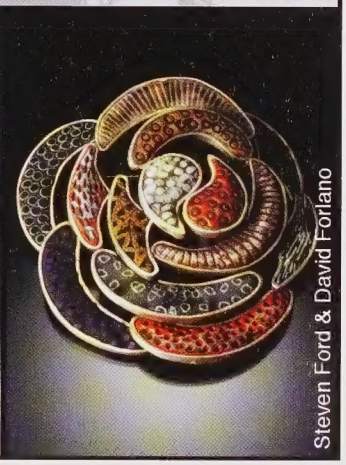
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Jamie Bennett, *Florilegium I*. Photo: Kevin Sprague

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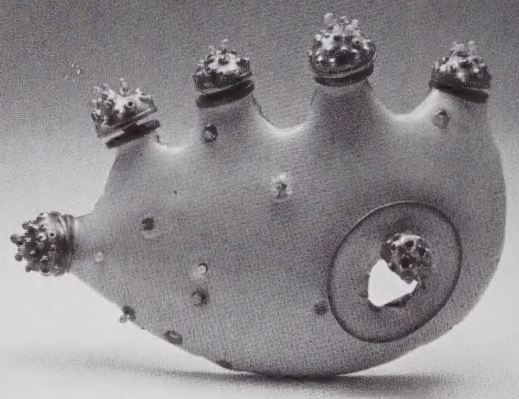

Monocarpic, brooch with removable magnetic ends, enamel, copper, sterling silver, 9.5 x 6.5 x 2.5cm, 2008.

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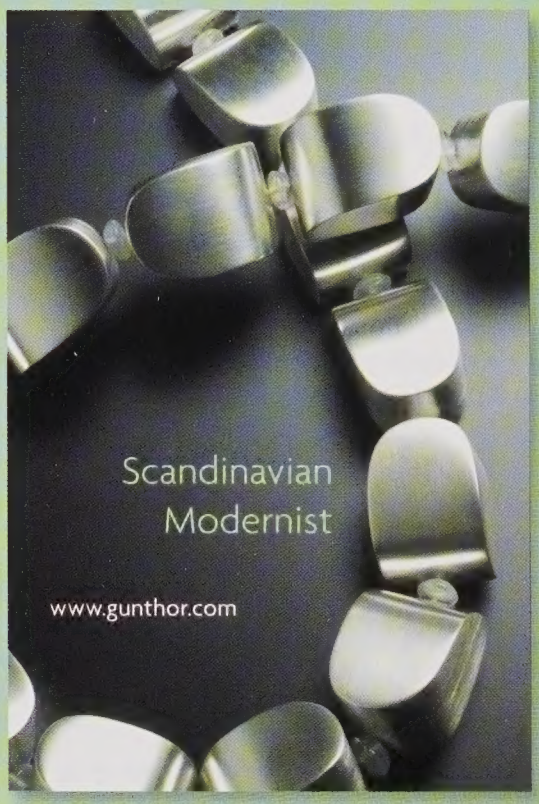

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CAD/RP Jewelry
Beyond the Whiz-bang Factor

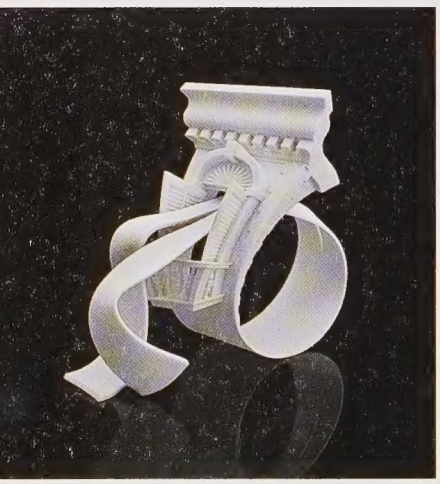
BY BRUCE METCALF

THE MOST RECENT SNAG conference, in Philadelphia, featured a number of exhibitions that included CAD (computer-aided design) and RP (rapid prototyping) jewelry as a significant part of the work on view. There was Stanley Lechtzin's retrospective at the Philadelphia Art Alliance; a Tyler School of Art alumni show in the new art building on the Temple campus; and the "Neoteric Matter 2" exhibition curated by Daniella Kerner, at Lewis Wexler Gallery. The concentration of work in CAD/RP print materials afforded a perfect opportunity to survey the state of the art.

Ten years ago, you could see examples of sophisticated use of design software in industrial and graphic design, but most jewelers who used CAD were still struggling to learn the software. Moreover, forms were clunky, and the print materials were often so limited as to be nearly useless for jewelry applications. But now, more jewelers have a working command of their software, especially Rhino. In addition, there are more print materials available.

Among the works in the SNAG conference exhibitions were a range of different form languages, some of which are pretty slick. Joshua DeMonte, a grad student at Tyler, developed an interesting series of necklaces and bracelets of rubbery architecture and blowing curtains. Doug Bucci has produced miniature wearable toes and fingers, which are both bizarre and poignant. (Doug has diabetes, and his limbs are patterned after amputations from diabetes patients.) And there's a new genre of CAD/RP that exploits the ability of some of the newer printers to generate interlocking forms. Bucci, Anthony Tamaro, and Lechtzin all make interesting mechanical linkages in CAD/RP jewelry.

In the studio jewelry world, RP has something of a bad reputation. Some people think all RP materials look the same. In fact, the options for both materials and colors are multiplying rapidly, and there is no longer a single look associated with RP. Many people object to the feel of the prints, too. They're probably thinking of Z-Corp gypsum prints, which feel grainy and abrasive. Other print materials are smooth and quite kind to skin and hand.



JOSHUA DEMONTE
Curtains and Balcony Bangle, 2008
33% glass-filled polyamide
5 x 6 x 7"
PHOTO: JOSHUA DEMONTE

Still, problems remain. The Z-Corp gypsum print is a lousy jewelry material, even though it's widely used. The color range has expanded, but it's still matte and rather dull. And it's brittle in thin sections, even when infiltrated with cyanoacrylate. Z-Corp prints are intended to be prototypes, not useful objects, and I believe they're inappropriate for most jewelry applications.

But the real problem with CAD/RP is that many of its users seem to be trying to prove a point about the technology. They want to design shapes that can only be made with the CAD/RP process, and this often leads to overdesign—the use of forms that seem to exist only because they couldn't be made (easily) any other way. Outside of a small circle of converts, however, nobody really cares how a thing is made—especially if it's made by a machine. There are so many miracles of CAD and computer-driven manufacturing that they have become commonplace, found in everything from cars to cell phones. The potential of CAD has been demonstrated thousands of times over. Computers and RP printers are tools, nothing more. The intelligence and skill of the operator matter more than the tool.

CAD/RP jewelry will mature only when the process becomes transparent. The best work will serve more important agendas than proving how great the technology is. When CAD/RP designers conclude that it's what their designs do and signify that matter, CAD/RP will emerge from its adolescence.

In jewelry, CAD/RP is a logical extension of certain early modernist articles of faith. One is that the legitimate expression of an era must use current technology. This argument was first popularized in Art Nouveau architecture, when exposed steel construction coexisted with whiplash tendrils. At the time, steel was ultramodern, as decisive a rejection of the past as all those squirming lines. The argument was later enshrined in high modernist design: glass and steel skyscrapers, molded plywood chairs, plastic coffee cups. More recently, Frank Gehry's buildings have been hailed for the same reason. High-tech software makes it possible to design the structure, and high-tech titanium covers the exteriors. Presto: instant relevance!

This has been Stanley Lechtzin's position since he took up electroforming

in the 1960s. Lechtzin's project has been to adapt industrial technologies to the small studio (or teaching studio) setting. First, he looked into electroforming; later, acrylic casting, photo-etching, and vacuum metal deposition; then a whole range of digital technologies, starting with digital design and computer controlled machining, and now rapid prototyping. Each technology represented the current moment, and each one insured him a privileged position in the forward progress of the field.

In jewelry, one of the side effects of the emphasis on technique is a corresponding emphasis on form, not content. Lechtzin co-opted the language of German modernism: he calls himself a form-giver, a term invented to distinguish the arty side of the design process from the engineering side. The engineers figured out how to manufacture things while the form-giver entertained more exalted concerns like aesthetics. But over time, Lechtzin's linkage between technology and form has fallen behind the curve. First, artists abandoned form as the proper subject of art. More recently, so have some designers.

Form ceased to be important in art around 1968, when Richard Serra scattered felt scraps on a floor and sloshed molten lead into the corner of a room. Anti-form became a hot subject in sculpture, relegating form to the sidelines. More recently, many artists treat form as an option, not a necessity. They are far more interested in the meanings of things than in their shapes.

The theoretical engine behind the investigation of pure form has faltered, too. Called formalism, it is associated with a lineage of thinking from Kant to Clement Greenberg. It is also associated with autonomy, the doctrine that the artwork must support disinterested aesthetic experience. Since 1980, both formalism and autonomy have been thoroughly discredited. No serious artist younger than 50 grants them much authority.

It was therefore surprising to see so many of the Tyler alumni busily inventing exotic forms. Fortunately, this tendency was less in evidence in the "Neoteric Matter 2" exhibition. Kimberly Voigt made a vignette about the struggles of staying productive: she designed a ring almost every day for a month and arranged the RP prints in sequence on a desk calendar. In Voigt's piece, process was completely overshadowed by content. Rebecca Strzelec exhibited two necklaces that seem to be about male fertility, though I found them heavy-handed and clunky. Gabrielle Fitzgibbon produced several laser-cut bracelets and necklaces that were quite lovely, and Doug Bucci's linked laser-sintered nylon necklace is totally convincing.

In time, CAD/RP will move to the background, and the polemic, so dependent on antiquated modernist verities, will become unnecessary. More jewelers will have the confidence to harness the tool to good ideas, not just extravagant forms. RP will be perceived as just one resource among many, and we will see composite structures: RP and found objects, say, or RP and textiles. The technology will reach maturity when we see jewelry that fully exploits CAD/RP—and nobody cares how it was made.

KIMBERLY VOIGT
A Ring a Day, 2008
Asterisk Ring, 7/2/2008:
3D systems InVision wax print, cast in sterling silver
Prototype rings: water infiltrated gypsum prints, cyanoacrylite, paint installation 22 x 22"

Bruce Metcalf is a studio jeweler and writer who lives near Philadelphia.

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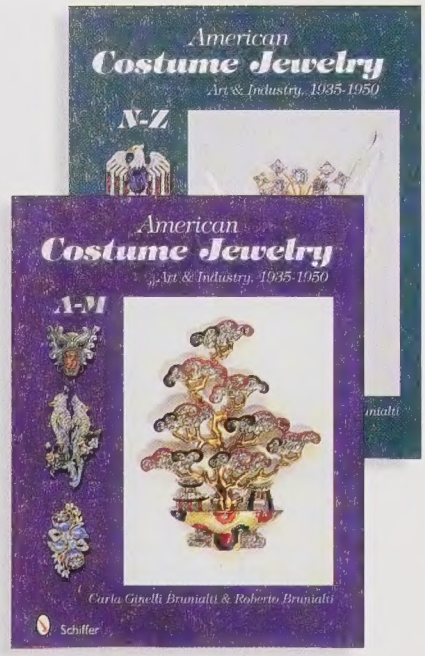
ALL BOOKS: SCHIFFER PUBLISHING, ATGLEN, PA, 2008

BY KATE FOGARTY



FROM ITS ORIGINS in the late nineteenth century, costume jewelry has evolved over the decades from mass-produced copies of European masterworks to an art form in its own right. Liberated by inexpensive materials, jewelry designers felt free to make pieces of true fancy, invention, and distinction. Costume jewelry was able to reflect trends: most companies offered a spring and fall collection, to correspond to fashion cycles. It was also suited to novelty pieces, such as patriotic pins during wartime, or items copied from or inspired by *Gone With the Wind*, *Snow White*, and other popular movies of the era. And the introduction of new metal techniques, synthetic jewels from Europe, and casting advancements, among other technologies, allowed for even more variety and intricacy. In fact, though "costume," these pieces were for the most part not cheap, and often hand finished, not to mention designed by many of the best craftsmen of the time.

Three recent books by Schiffer Publishing—*American Costume Jewelry: Art & Industry 1935-1950; The Best of Costume Jewelry*; and *Jewels of Passion: Costume Jewelry Masterpieces*—address the range of work within this genre. For all the scholarliness and/or sweep implied by the titles, none is a fully comprehensive guide to the field. Each is really a catalogue of a specific collection, which, however broad or well documented, reflects all the quirks and particularities inevitable to a single point of view.

If one had to choose a single title, *American Costume Jewelry* (in two volumes, A-M and N-Z), by Roberto Brunialti and Carla Ginelli Brunialti, is the most thorough, well researched, and best photographed of the three. Authors of two previous volumes titled *American Costume Jewelry* (only available in Italian), the Brunialtis have updated and revised these tomes and added 300 new pieces. All of the jewels featured are from their personal collection. They are sticklers for provenance: to the extent possible, each piece is accompanied by patent drawings and advertisements from magazines of the time; dates are also verified by corresponding improvements in metal technologies, and other clues like markings or stamps. No prices are offered, though they've rated each piece according to a star system based on its quality and importance for collectors.

According to the Brunialtis, the years between 1935 and 1950 were the peak of costume jewelry in terms of design, materials, stones, and manufacturing quality. It's true that remarkably few innovations have been achieved in the industry since then. Until 1935, costume jewelry in America was confined to imported copies of pieces by European jewelers, and French fashion ruled: women often made their own clothes from Paris-pilfered designs, and the Hollywood glitterati were seen in nothing but couture. However, the Depression resulted in a growing American appetite for inexpensive "novelty jewelry," and manufacturers answered the call with original and provocative pieces. They began to patent their new designs; in these 15 years, about 4,000 costume jewelry patents were issued. Perhaps the most creative period in the U.S. was during World War II, when the lack of European influence and rationing of materials spurred the best designers and manufacturers to create stunningly original designs. Many "American" designers at the time were European emigrés, who fused their sophistication and tradition with Yankee style. Artists like Salvador Dali and designers like Norman Bel Geddes also contributed pieces, and entire collections were based on movies of the time—even *Dumbo*. The Brunialtis argue that post-1947, American costume jewelry declined in quality and innovation. European pieces were again available for import to the U.S., and with the advent of Dior's "New Look," all eyes again turned to Paris.

The introduction to *American Costume Jewelry* gives an easily digested history of those early decades, along with information on patents, materials, techniques, and dating and attribution. The Brunialtis catalogue the most important manufacturers of the era in alphabetical order, with a brief history of the firm when possible, and a list of designers who worked for the company. Information on markings and stamps is provided (though strangely not illustrated). The photographs are ravishing, and all pieces are shown

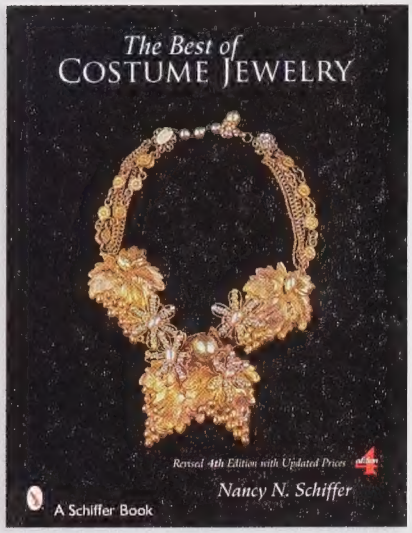
The years between 1935 and 1950 were the peak of costume jewelry in terms of design, materials, stones, and manufacturing quality.

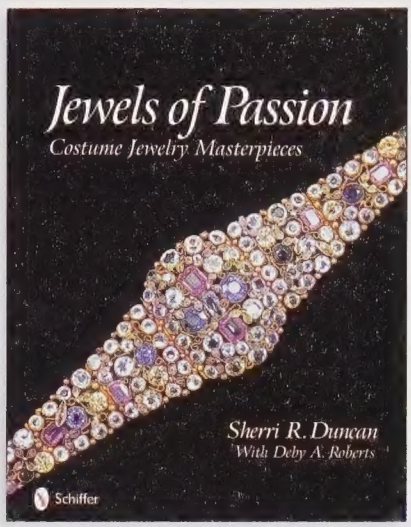
generously in actual size. Next to each work, if available, is a patent drawing and/or magazine clipping featuring said piece; the authors are also quick to point out when such valuable attribution is not available, and if the design was pirated or was itself copied. It's admirable sleuthing on the Brunialtis' part.

To accept the contents of these two volumes as the last word on costume jewelry of the time would be a mistake, however. While the Brunialtis' collection is vast, and represents many of the important pieces and trends of this golden era, it is by no means an exhaustive source. Like any personal collection, it's shaped by the collectors' predilections and tastes. For example, the book devotes 31 pages to Marcel Boucher and 71 to Coro—but shows a single bauble by Hattie Carnegie and gives a paltry 10 pages to Miriam Haskell (most of which feature post-1950 jewels). Of the biggest names in manufacturing at the time, Trifari is extensively covered, yet there's no section on Monet or Napier (though their production at the time is acknowledged in the introduction). Why do some firms have historical information, and some don't, and why is it sometimes in the body of the text, sometimes in a caption? The Italian-American firm Pennino, though not a major player, is given star billing; perhaps it's a favorite of the Italian authors. The collection seems to exhibit a preference for figural themes, like insects, birds, animals, dancers, and chuckling children, and novelty designs (and a troubling number of un-PC African-American figures), as opposed to more traditionally designed parures or European-influenced pieces. They also devote sections to patriotic jewels, unsigned works, and "Jelly Bellies," animal-shaped brooches made of sterling or metal with bellies crafted of Lucite. And regarding Frank Rebajes, a jewelry artist who worked in copper and silver, should his handmade pieces be considered "costume" or bona fide works of art?

The Best of Costume Jewelry by Nancy N. Schiffer, for the most part explores the collection of Fior, the legendary costume jewelry shop in London, which was featured in 1985 in an exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum. The Fior collection surveys the entirety of the 20th century, and is not limited to American designs; indeed, the introduction notes that the world center for fashion ping-ponged across the globe over the years (Paris, New York, Paris, London, L.A.…). The author acknowledges at the start that the Fior collection is far from comprehensive; it "follows in design traditional European styles," many of which are hand finished and 18k gold plated (and have been replated and reset). Thus, there is page after page of glamorous, elegant pieces, but not much of the novelty or innovation visible in the Brunialtis' book. Schiffer doesn't bother with attributions, noting markings, dates, and sometimes even designers with no regularity. However, she brings to light certain American manufacturers, like Kramer, Ralph Polcini (LEDO), and Ciner, not even mentioned in the Brunialtis' tome. As the book extends to the later part of the century, it is clear that costume pieces of high style and quality were in fact created in the States, contrary to the Brunialtis' assertions; perhaps this work just wasn't to their taste. However, the book feels hastily done; the text is negligible, the photos blurry or dated—and the cover image is backwards.

Jewels of Passion: Costume Jewelry Masterpieces could be dismissed full stop as a vanity publication were it not for the breadth of author Sherri R. Duncan's impressive collection. A veterinarian by trade, Duncan has somehow assembled hundreds of vintage costume jewelry pieces, many in sets, many of them exceptional. However, its high school-confidential tone, epidemic exclamation points, and numerous spelling errors (it's spelled *collectible*) seem the stuff of a scrapbook. Whereas the Fior collection boasts that their pieces have never been worn, witness snapshots of Sherri, donned in glitzy faux rubies performing laser surgery on a housepet, in a rhinestone bib necklace at the clinic's Christmas party, or blinging for broke at the Kentucky Derby. And with no dates, prices, markings, labels to accompany the (dark) photographs, the book is eye candy at best.





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Mary Lee Hu
The Golden Touch

BY JUDY WAGONFELD

AT THE TERMINUS of a single-lane road, a dirt driveway descends to a humble hillside home. The cedar shake exterior, weathered to a fine patina by Seattle's insistent mist and rain, echoes its self-effacing owner, jewelry artist Mary Lee Hu.

Notoriety was never Hu's goal. But now, at the age of 66, Hu has gained international stature. As a professor of metals and jewelry at the University of Washington from 1980 to 2006, she enhanced a program that originated with hollowware in 1916 and then blossomed under Ruth Pennington's Scandinavian influence and Ramona Solberg's found-object style. Undeterred by Northwest trends, Hu stuck tenaciously to the fundamentals of pristine technique, pattern, line, and the historical context of jewelry as body ornamentation.

"I'm a formalist," Hu says. "I don't really fit in with the Pacific Northwest style." In fact, she adds, "I've never sold a gold necklace in Seattle." Fortunately, they do sell where outdoor gear is not *de rigueur*. And they land in museums; notably the Metropolitan Museum, the Renwick Gallery, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Victoria & Albert Museum, and Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. Awards and grants, including those from the Flintridge Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, have come her way. "I can't believe I've been doing this work for 40 years," she says, "without a life crisis!"

Mary Lee Hu in her Seattle studio, in front of her collection of chain mail items, 2009

This makes sense, considering that her artistic convictions solidified following the premature death of her husband in 1972, while they were living in Taiwan. After remaining with her mother-in-law in Taiwan for a year, she then traveled with her father to 15 Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Assimilating non-Western art and anthropology in a new aesthetic became her *raison d'être*.

Visiting Hu's home and studio immerses me in her life's currents. Person, professor, and artist meld as solidly as metalwork, as intricately as the chain mail vests and bags tacked to her white studio walls. At Hu's front door, a Chinese lettered plaque whispers of her Taiwan era. The entry opens to an airy vaulted living room boasting a vast library of literature on body adornment. Exotic trinkets sprout from every surface. Jewelry dangles from nails, spills from bowls, perches on shelves, and nestles in frames.

Tucked behind a rugged stone fireplace, an oblong table beckons. Occupying a porch-like space, the light-infused area seats 14 for Hu's well-loved Chinese dinners. Everything reads cozy cabin—the antithesis of Hu's formal gold craft. At first, reconciling Hu's homespun environment and reserved personality with her exquisite necklaces, bracelets, and rings is difficult. Asked if she wears her own jewelry, she bursts out laughing. Not her look, she says.

Hu's studio overlooks the Olympic Mountains, and Puget Sound where ferries glide by—a bonanza of nature and art. An outside deck above her vegetable garden becomes a summer weaving haven. When working inside, Hu listens to books or meditates.

Office paraphernalia and a light table littered with images fill half the space. The rest holds a press, cabinets, and a workbench laden with a wood toolbox, saws and vises, baskets stuffed with files, graph paper, pencils, pens, and feathers. And goldstrands of 18k gold, bands of 22k gold.

Hu revels in jewelry work after a multiyear hiatus spent teaching and developing her body adornment course. She misses students, but not university politics. At her workbench, clad in a well-worn chartreuse corduroy shirt and Optivisor, Hu could be a cobbler from another century. But her hands twist the shimmering gold wires she fabricates from ingots as casually as they would stirring oatmeal. Grappling with gold at $900 an ounce haunts her, but gold is her love; its glow, malleability, history, and lack of tarnish.

The infatuation rose from a New York

"I'm a formalist," Hu says. "I don't really fit in with the Pacific Northwest style."

gallery's challenge to design necklaces based on opera's major diva roles. Selected to celebrate Elizabeth Rethberg's *Aida* role, Hu knew the opera's Egyptian locale demanded gold, an abrupt departure from her work in silver. The resultant *Choker #70* (1985), consists of multilayered woven Xs and open diamond shapes. The project hooked Hu as doggedly as Gold Fever afflicted prospectors during the Alaska Gold Rush—those who, incidentally, all set sail from Seattle.

Handling Hu's jewelry feels like fingering forbidden fruit. But Hu encourages me. She explains the woven threads based on textiles and Native basketry; positive and negative spaces; how a piece slips on a finger and knuckle or wrist; how an amulet/collar adorns the neck.

Hu's prior silver art bore nature's organic fluidity with an Art Nouveau take. In gold, an architectural motif, fabricated by tessellation, dominated. In 1998 Hu aimed to loosen up. Weaving variously sized gold tubes, she sliced off rounds and soldered the raw edges. By hammering, twisting, and squashing with her fingers, she reduced circumferences to ring, bracelet, and choker dimensions. Sinuous undulations in these and recent ropy forays overlap like crashing waves or rippling ribbons. Asymmetry and interplay seduce the eye. The two eras seem Mies van der Rohe versus Frank Gehry.

Much has been made of Hu's signature double-twining, textural technique that twists around warps. She downplays its uniqueness, pointing to the infinite permutations of chains stashed in her "teaching suitcase." Though she's mastered many, she remains confounded by a Turkish seven-loop chain.

Hu fell for art jewelry at the age of 16 after viewing John Paul Miller's granulated gold and enameled insects at the Cleveland Museum. Art camp led to a BFA at Cranbrook Academy of Art and an MFA from Southern Illinois University. There, mentor Brent Kington suggested she try wire. As she was studying macramé, "before it became a plant hanging horror," she wove a necklace in silver because, she says, "I was in love and I wanted credit for two classes with one object." It worked, but eventually basketry techniques produced better results.

As an educator herself, Hu nurtured students to find their own voice. Indeed, she spawned a slew of renowned jewelers, including Flora Book, Gina Pankowski, and Lori Talcott. Sadly, the University of Washington recently merged jewelry with an interdisciplinary arts program, a move Hu fears will diminish quality.

The artist at her bench with works in progress

Hu's passion for history relates to family dating to the Mayflower. A guest bedroom holds landscape and portrait paintings by her parents and relatives, an 1808 cross-stitched family tree, and sundry artifacts from her Ohio youth. Admitting her love of collecting, she sighs, "I need to stop doing this—I'm getting to an age where I need to deaccession." That's unlikely.

Back in the dining room, we sip coffee and talk. Hu's easy smile exudes the confidence of one at harmony. A robust sense of personal and professional identity defines her path. Contemporary Nancy Worden says, "She is more than a fine educator. She is one of the best designers of her generation, crafting drop-dead gorgeous jewelry."

That remains Hu's goal: to create splendid, graceful art that pushes the edges. She does not make jokes or political statements. Her jewelry harbors no hidden meaning or narrative. It ignores the controversies of gold mining. Like Hu, it displays clarity of vision and joy. This is her legacy and homage to gold. And, it's more than enough.

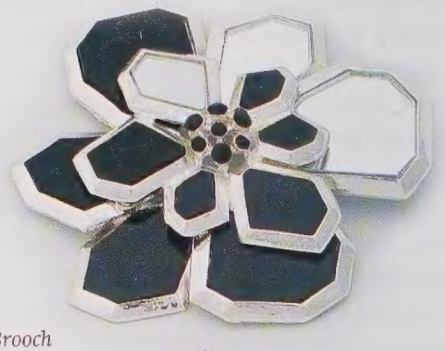
Choker #90, 2008–09
18k, 24k gold
9 ½ x 8 ¾ x 1 ¾"
PHOTO: CYNTHIA BRENNAN, COURTESY MOBILIA GALLERY

Judy Wagonfeld is a freelance writer who covers art, travel, food and people for diverse publications.

Veleta Vancza
Finding More for Less

"I'M ROUGH ON THE JEWELRY I WEAR," says studio jeweler and designer Veleta Vancza. "I'm constantly on the lookout for inexpensive pieces that are smart, funky, stylish, and easily replaceable." Accordingly, Vancza bought every piece of jewelry shown here at local malls (in Kingston and Poughkeepsie, New York) for less than $25, and most for under $10. Vancza reports that these works, although modest in price, generate big viewer impact, especially among her artist peers.

Earrings from Claire's

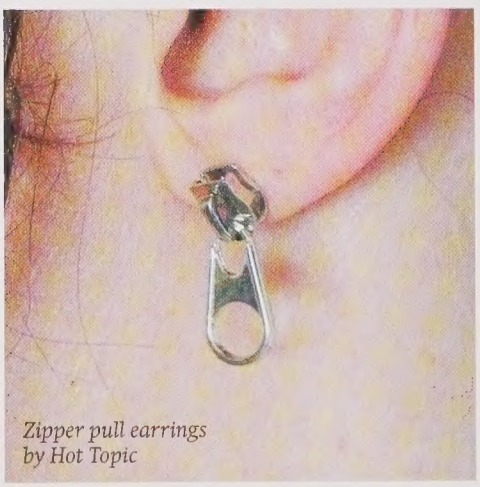


Brooch from Macy's

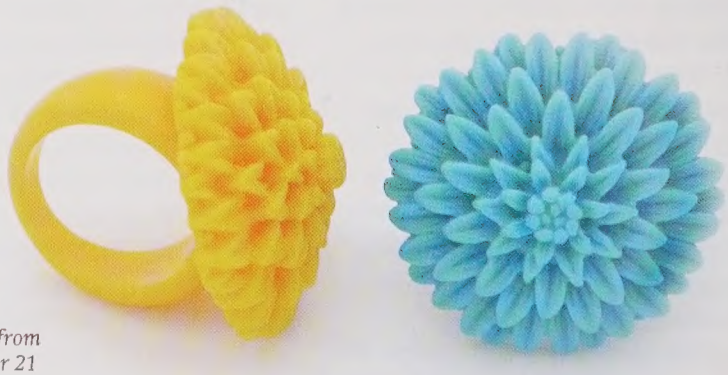
Ring by Guess

Aldo brand bracelet

Nail earrings by Hot Topic



Zipper pull earrings by Hot Topic



Rings from Forever 21

Studio jeweler Lola Brooks modeling Express necklace and ring from Forever 21

Objects of Remembrance
Contemporary Mourning Jewelry

BY MARJORIE SIMON

IDIOTS
NR II, 2008
taxidermy bird, felt, Swarovski crystals/ pearls, glass/plastic beads
13 ¾ x 2 ¾"

KIM ERIC LILOT
Self-Portrait Without Skin, 1997
14k gold, platinum, rubelite tourmaline cabochons
⅞ x 1 ½ x 1"
COLLECTION SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM, WASHINGTON, D.C.
PHOTO: KIM ERIC LILOT

JONATHON WAHL
Jet Drawing: Totem, 2008
charcoal on paper
48 x 32"
PHOTO: BRYAN HELM, COURTESY SIENNA GALLERY

DEATH, LIKE LIFE, is full of contradictions. To lose a love object, be it virtual or tangible, is to feel in some measure abandoned, adrift, relieved, isolated in pain, united in grief, or guilty for surviving. Mourners crave comfort, and people connect to share the heavy work of mourning. Artists turn to making.

Objects can be the vessels for ideas and vectors for feelings, including memory.[1] Nearly everyone has cherished objects inhabited by past narratives, and it is no accident that jewelry has historically been a major repository for memories. Jewelry worn to signify mourning communicates wordlessly to others that the individual has suffered a significant loss. It also symbolizes to the bereaved, intimately and directly on the body, the presence of the deceased.

Mourning jewelry has existed as a genre in European decorative arts since the Renaissance. Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as women assumed more responsibility for the emotional life within bourgeois society, jewelry provided a way to express tender and deep emotions which might be otherwise prohibited or discouraged.[2] Gifts of remembrance, including tiny portraits in ivory or enamel, bracelets woven of hair, and lockets containing intimate inscriptions were as much a part of love as of loss.

But the popularity of mourning jewelry soared in the nineteenth century during the reign of Queen Victoria, when mourning itself seemed to become an art. The Queen was born into the Industrial Revolution and presided over British colonial dominance (1837–1901) in a time of enthusiasm for science and global exploration. Her beloved husband Prince Albert was only 42 years old when, in 1861, he succumbed during an outbreak of typhoid fever. Victoria remained in deep mourning for the next 40 years, wearing only black clothing and jewelry, which had an enormous impact on custom and fashion for future generations. The Victorian era, comprising nearly the entire nineteenth century, has since become synonymous with extremes of feeling and a virtual cult of death.

The wide range of contemporary mourning jewelry could be divided into a few general categories, based loosely on their relationship to the precedents of Western jewelry. First, *historically themed* work, namely the use of pre-Victorian motifs, including *memento mori* objects such as skulls, and the use of materials such as human hair and dead animals. Secondly, *conscious Victoriana*, which frankly references formal motifs, sentiments, or content from the Victorian era. And last, *commemorative narratives* of personal bereavement, which may or may not reference historical precedent.

The *memento mori* object, variously translated as

MELANIE BILENKER
Nap, 2008
gold, ebony, resin,
pigment, hair
2 x 1 ¼ x ⅜"
PHOTO: KEN YANOVIAK

KELLY MCCALLUM
Untitled (ring), 2006
human bone, bird skull, pearls
2 ⅜ x ⅝ x 1"

"remember, you must die," or "remember, you are mortal," appeared somewhere around the sixteenth century and has never really disappeared, irregardless of decorative fashions.[3] Not strictly mourning jewelry, the classic *memento mori* piece referred not to a specific person, but to a general warning about the transitory nature of life. In the post-Reformation seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an obsession with death, combined with the emerging love of mechanical toys and *automata*, produced clocks and timepieces of all sizes, fashioned into skulls and skeletons of gold, rock crystal, diamonds, and enamel. A stunning example from 1610 is the *Mechanical Screaming Biting Skull Clock with Animated Snakes for Eyeballs*, designed and built by Nicolaus Schmidt der Junger of Augsburg, Germany. The clock's jaws open and snap shut every three minutes, and a snake shoots out of the eye socket.[4] In 1997, San Francisco goldsmith Kim Eric Lilot designed and built *Self-Portrait Without Skin*, one of a series of gold and gemstone *memento mori* jewelry, including a group of skull pendants wearing jaunty top hats carved from assorted semiprecious stones. Like drawings by countless adolescent boys, Lilot's carved skulls grin and glower, grasped by tiny bony hands like the figure in Edvard Munch's 1893 painting *The Scream*.

Mourning jewelry from the eighteenth century graphically depicts grieving men and women weeping over the loss of loved ones. Greatly influenced by German romanticism, jewelry containing human hair was common among bourgeois women. Hair curled in a decorative pattern was given in friendship or worn to signify closeness between women. At the time of death, one's hair would be taken to a goldsmith, who might have been recommended by the funeral parlor. In a mourning brooch the hair may be braided (think Celtic knot) but the cut ends will be visible; the cut edge "embodied" the moment of transition from the natural (living) to the cultural (dead). Like a religious relic, including the actual body part concretizes death and acts as a *memento mori*.

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Contemporary artist Melanie Bilenker's quiet brooches from her "womangirl" series most resemble Georgian "cut work" in which "strands of hair were spread over glue-covered paper and allowed to dry, whereupon the hair-covered paper was cut into various shapes and arranged into the mourning scene."[5] The bezel settings are of a style illustrated in a 1790 goldsmith's advertisement for mourning jewelry. Frankly female, Bilenker's work

CONSTANZE SCHREIBER
Untitled (bracelet), 2006
fine silver
3 3/8 x 3 x 1 3/4"
PHOTO: TOM HAARTSEN

ANYA KIVARKIS
Brooch #3 (back), 2007
fine and sterling silver, enamel auto paint, blue spinels
4 1/4 x 1 3/4 x 3/4"
PHOTO: KEVIN SPRAGUE, COURTESY SIENNA GALLERY

embodies the nascent twenty-first century in its willingness to expose formerly private moments such as bathing, but it also embraces the personal. Though not specifically about grief, their narrative subject is often downcast and tentative.

Consciously appropriating the iconography of European decorative arts, several artists prominently feature actual dead animals. Afke Golsteijn and Floris Bakker, the Dutch duo known as Idiots, frequently enlist taxidermy birds as the centerpiece of their jewelry. Kelly McCallum, an American now living in London, subverts sentimentality by incorporating taxidermic specimens and human bone into her jewelry and objects. Attracted by the conundrum of death in life, McCallum uses her goldsmithing skills as well as the implied meanings of her other materials such as gold and gemstones. She brings a jeweler's sensibility without overt reference to historical forms. Her precedent is the Cabinet of Curiosities or museum collections of the eighteenth century.

Constanze Schreiber appears to combine the sensuality of death with iconic Romantic jewelry. As in *Marie*, her sizeable jeweled silhouettes both attract and repel. The eye is inexorably drawn to the rippling fur, the way animals' bodies may be scrutinized without shame; placing them on the human body invites an unwelcome intimacy. Schreiber's bold work stands out by virtue of its transformative treatment of nature and its transgressive appropriation of other species. She draws on antique jewelry for inspiration. A bracelet made of a double circlet of silver skulls is less charming than Lilot's skeletons. The heads are nearly crushed and fused together, as if crammed in a mass grave; certainly not the genteel weeping under a willow tree.

Queen Victoria didn't give up her jewels; she made them black. Her popularization of gemstone jet—deeply black, fossilized vegetation created by millennia of pressure in stagnant seawater, most notably in Whitby, England—coincided with the invention of cut steel, also a dark color, and emblematic of the industrial north of England. Carvable, extremely lightweight, and capable of being highly polished, jet was the answer to adornment while grieving. As in every age, new technologies were used in jewelry making, and Victorian mourning jewelry was made from available and popular materials such as wood, enamel, glass (known as French jet), gutta percha (a dark brown organic resin, used as a substitute for jet), horn, ivory, hair, shell (dyed and molded), and Vulcanite (also known as Ebonite). The Victorian period coincided with that of the massive losses of the American Civil War, and Americans imitated British mourning as they did their other customs. The intrinsic beauty of jet meant it would

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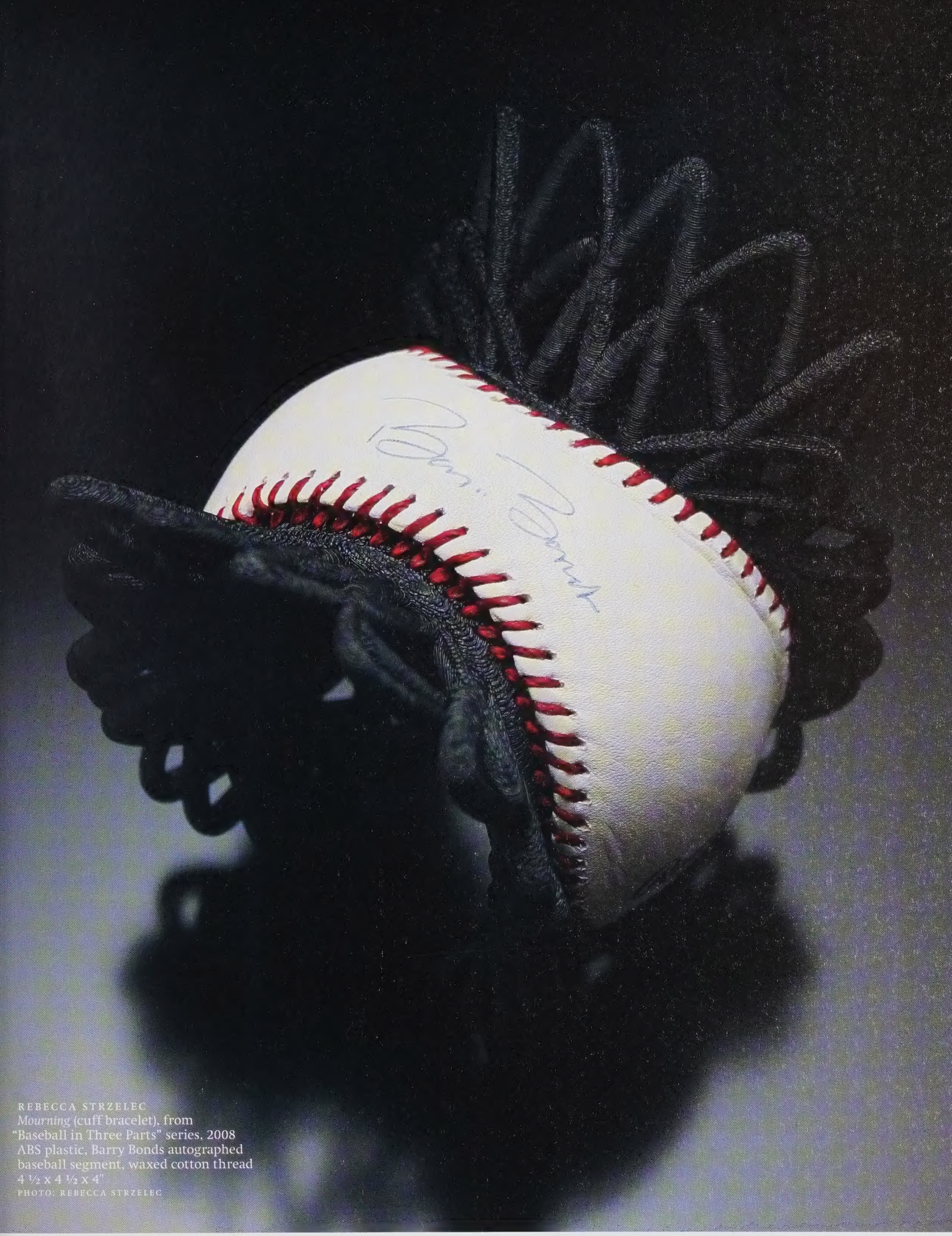


REBECCA STRZELEC
Mourning (cuff bracelet), from "Baseball in Three Parts" series, 2008
ABS plastic, Barry Bonds autographed baseball segment, waxed cotton thread
4 ½ x 4 ½ x 4"
PHOTO: REBECCA STRZELEC

LOLA BROOKS
Bleeding Heart (brooch), 2009
vintage rose cut garnets,
stainless steel, 14k gold
4 ½ x 4 ½ x 2"
PHOTO COURTESY OF SIENNA GALLERY

not be restricted to mourning, and today's artists enlist it for its range of traits and associations.

Jonathan Wahl, Anya Kivarkis, and Lola Brooks recall and reconfigure the giddy heights of Victorian extremes. Kivarkis and Wahl have taken similar forms and rendered them in nearly opposite ways: Wahl with immense charcoal drawings of jewels, and Kivarkis with stark white modest-sized silhouettes of nearly the same form. Both share an affinity with Schreiber for classic Victorian symmetry. Wahl grabs the Victorian jewelry object and enlarges it on the wall, wresting it from its intimacy on the human body and confronting it as a two-dimensional form. He transforms the hand-carved crafted object into "art" and forces the viewer to apprehend the representation of form and surface, reflectivity and illusion. Kivarkis locates her work "in a place between drawing and object, an idea of the piece and the thing itself." She has taken the formal stasis of the Victorian brooch and whitewashed it, effacing the carved or worked surface and leaving us with a form nearly everyone will recognize as "jewel." Brooks has been parsing the rose in much of her current work, but she too subverts the sentimentalized heart with black mourning ribbons and garnets, the latter being acceptable gems during half-mourning, as they symbolize drops of blood. Packing another large woven heart with an overabundance of white roses, Brooks appears to deride the purity implicit in her choice of symbols. One can imagine the perfume to be suffocating, and the thorns piercing.

In the United States, a recent exhibition titled

Quite apart from historical precedent, most jewelers have at some time created objects that refer to a significant personal loss, a loss that for them cannot be metabolized without making *something*.

"Decorative Resurgence," featured numerous objects of mourning and memory, mostly by young women. The early twenty-first century is indeed witness to a decorative resurgence. In her essay for the exhibition catalogue, Jennifer Zwilling observed that the "Modernist aesthetic so thoroughly expunged ornament from our visual vocabulary in the mid Twentieth Century that the mere suggestion of decorative elements on an object can now evoke a sense of the distant past."[6] The current generation of young jewelers continues to look to Europe for inspiration, but some are beginning to combine European history with American narrative. Rebecca Strzelec's baseball mourning cuffs connect her father's passion for the sport with the loss of the American dream, as summer heroes tumble to drug scandals.

Quite apart from historical precedent, most jewelers have at some time created objects that refer to a significant personal loss—a child, sibling or parent, a home, a relationship—a loss that for them cannot be metabolized without making *something*. Life is long; losses accumulate. With time, grief retreats and life goes on. Not the same life, to be sure, but one's life nonetheless. The personal commemorative object has layers of meaning, some of which may be coded. Work done mainly for oneself, often not for public consumption, may be quieter and contemplative.

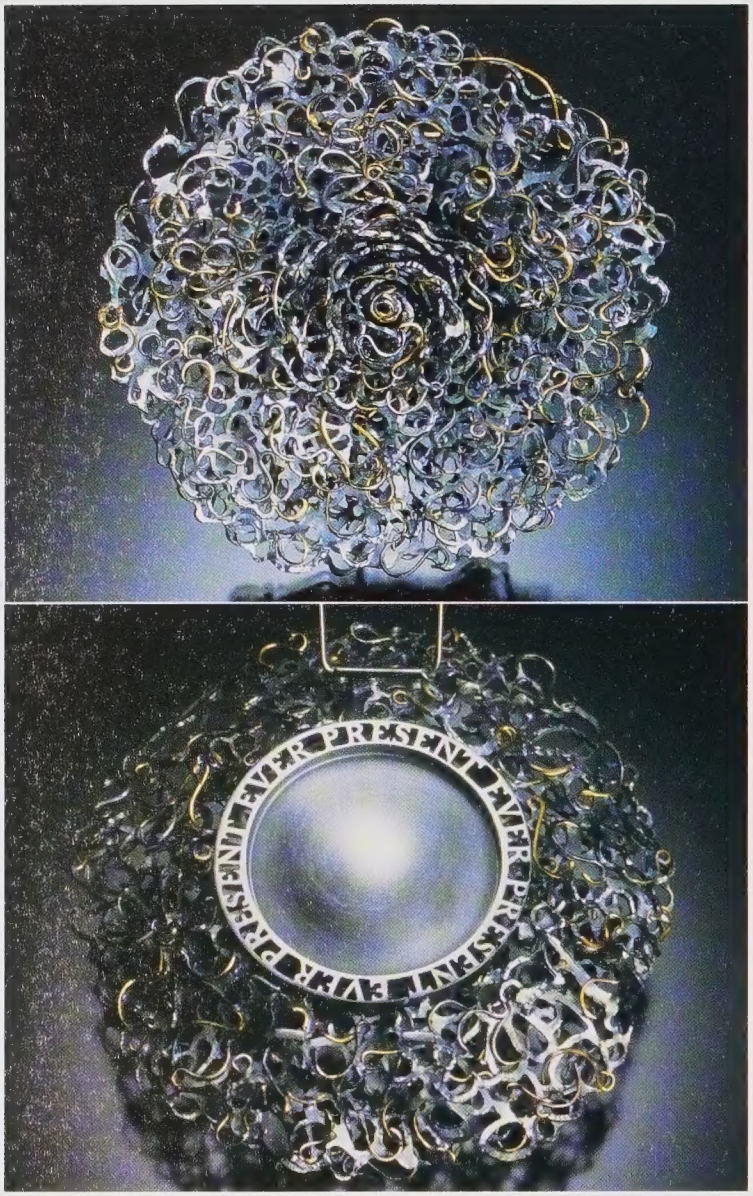
Lorena Lazard, a Mexican artist, commemorates her father's death with a contemporary reliquary containing soil from his grave. Susan Mahlstedt uses the form of a classic cameo to allude to the winter landscape that occupied her late husband Bill Ruth's attention during his illness. Her solitary tree recalls the weeping willows of traditional mourning scenes. Even without the artist's personal narrative, the wearer could be soothed by its imagery.

A rational fear of death also haunts the living. Artist Doug Bucci, diabetic since childhood, has begun to address in his work the implications of living with a life-threatening illness (a "train wreck," in his words). His brooch *Transmet* (on cover) invokes issues of body integrity; he wears it as a talisman. Bucci materializes his fear of amputation, the most common consequence of diabetes. The anatomically correct foot becomes the literal embodiment of Bucci's fear—but he tames it by making the foot a healthy pink; in reality, the gangrenous appendage would be black and disfigured.

Historian Christiane Holm believes that mourning jewelry serves the function of "showing and hiding,"[7] and that it is important to understand how "hiding and revealing, absence and presence, anonymity and naming operate to sustain acts of memory."[8] Holm is not alone in

LORENA LAZARD
Today We Bury You (sculpture), 2005
pure silver, sterling, 24k bimetal gold, epoxy color, acrylic, soil from artist's father's grave
3 x 1 3/4 x 3/4"

SUSAN MAHLSTEDT
Winter Tree #1, 2007
18k gold, sterling silver
2 x 1 1/4 x 3/8"



B. SHARON PORTELANCE
Ever Present (brooch), 2001
(front and back)
sterling silver, 22k gold
3 ½ x 3 ½ x 1"

discussing the function of souvenirs: "Mourning jewels," she says, "are exhibited secrets."[9] Sharon Portelance makes use of the hidden, with text juxtaposed, coded, and presented backward, to guard its secret message. Dark yet somehow familiar, Portelance hides the specificity of deceased family members and universalizes the work with oblique references to memory.

Vladimir Nabokov wrote that when we concentrate on a material object, "the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into the history of that object.... Transparent things, through which the past shines."[10] Commemorative objects, jewelry, and mementos stand in for an historical moment and everything associated with it from that time forth. Sometimes it looks as if the entire genre of Victoriana has become shorthand for memory itself.

The Victorian age was a time when death and grief were frequent companions. It continues to cast a long shadow over jewelry, especially among the young jewelers, whose narratives have much to do with memory. The desire to mark the loss of a loved one began with the Neanderthals and became part of the human equation. Maybe jewelers are the lucky ones, for surely *creating* an intimate object offers as much solace as possessing it. Gijs Bakker created his monumental chrysanthemum and gerbera daisy neckpieces while grieving for his wife Emmy van Leersum several years ago. He placed one petal after another in a spiral; literally, painstaking work. Work at which one takes pains can gradually abrade the pain of loss.

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The author would like to thank Elizabeth Wojcik. Museum of Mourning Art, Arlington Cemetery, Drexel Hill, PA, and Anastacia's Antiques, 617 Bainbridge Street, Philadelphia.

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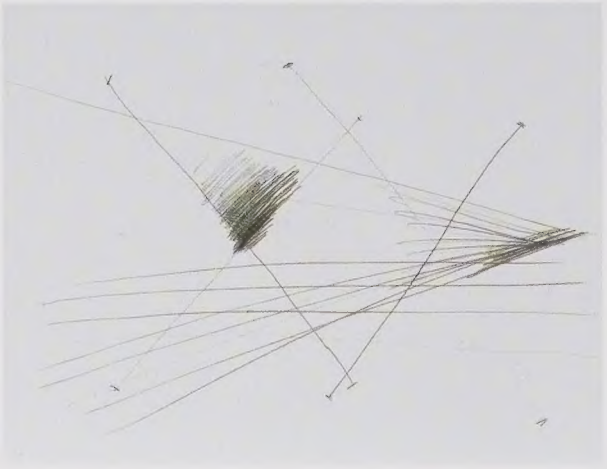
1. See Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993) and Bill Brown, ed., *Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) for current thinking on objects and meaning.
2. Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
3. "In ancient Rome, the phrase is said to have been used on the occasions when a Roman general was parading through the streets of Rome during the victory celebration known as a triumph. Standing behind the victorious general was a slave, and he had the task of reminding the general that, though he was up on the peak today, tomorrow was another day. The servant did this by telling the general that he should remember that he was mortal: "Memento mori." It is also possible that the servant said, rather, "Respice post te! Hominem te esse memento!": "Look behind you! Remember that you are but a man!", as noted in Tertullian in his Apologeticus." Email correspondence from Kim Eric Lilot.
4. www.oobject.com/category/memento-mori-timepieces/
5. Maureen DeLorme, *Mourning Art and Jewelry* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2004), p. 66.
6. Jennifer Zwilling in "Decorative Resurgence," 2009 catalogue for exhibition organized by Jill Baker Gower, pp. 5-6.
7. Christiane Holm. Project Muse. http://muse.jhu.edu "Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewelry with Hair." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 38, no.1 (2004), p. 142.
8. Ibid., p. 143.
9. Ibid., p. 140.
10. Vladimir Nabokov, *Transparent Things* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), p. 1.

GIJS BAKKER
Dahlia Necklace, 1984
flower petals, PVC
13 3/8 x 11 1/2 x 3/4"

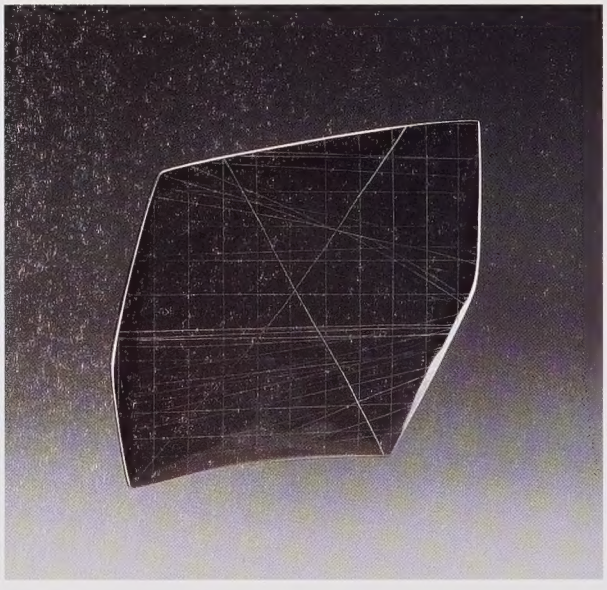
Margaret West
Poetic Truths

BY CINDI STRAUSS

Still Life
(natura mortua), 2003
stone, paint,
graphite, wax
dimensions variable
PHOTO: RAUNO TRÄSKELIN



Transient Image Brooch, 1980
stainless steel, paint
2 1/16 x 2 1/4 x 1/2"
COLLECTION THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON, HELEN WILLIAMS DRUTT COLLECTION
PHOTO: THOMAS R. DUBROCK



Transient Image Brooch, 1979
stainless steel
2 x 2 1/2 x 1/2"
COLLECTION THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON, HELEN WILLIAMS DRUTT COLLECTION
PHOTO: THOMAS R. DUBROCK

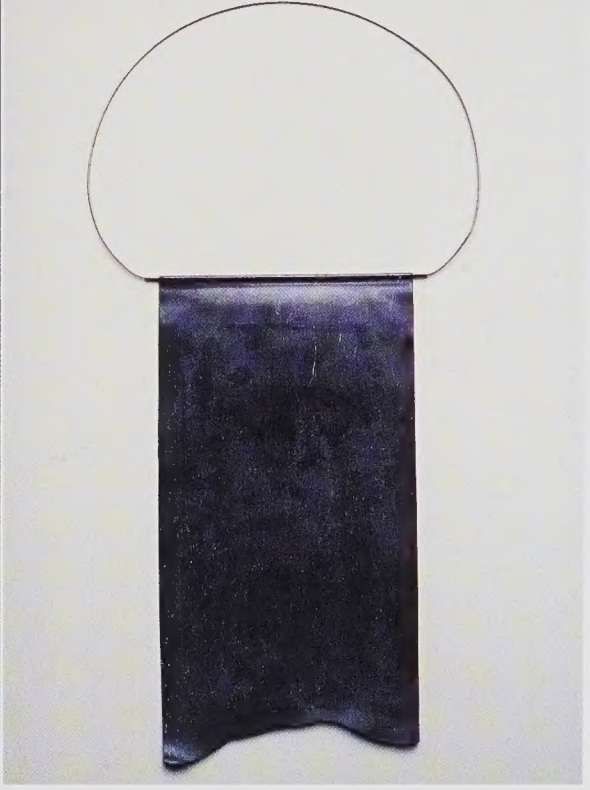
OVER HER 40-YEAR ARTISTIC CAREER, Margaret West has constructed a remarkable range of jewelry that engages subjects both physical and emotional, both real and imagined. For West, jewelry has always been a means of communication. While many artists imbue their jewelry with content, West takes a particularly poetic approach to her practice. She recently described her intention: "to achieve a discriminating balance between distress and artistry, between desolation and beauty, to sublimate wrath in a quest for a more subtle, elegiac eloquence. More simply: to achieve a discerning balance of paradoxical elements."[1]

West was born in Melbourne in 1936. As a child, she developed an interest in music, literature, and visual arts that was actively supported by her parents. In the early 1950s, she enrolled in the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), which would become her educational home over the next 20 years. Initially, West studied graphic art and sculpture, receiving an advanced certificate in visual art in 1955. After graduation, she worked as an editorial assistant and illustrator for the educational publisher Longman, later segueing from there to teaching art at a school for disadvantaged children in inner-city Melbourne.[2]

While teaching, West returned to RMIT to pursue advanced studies in art, eventually receiving a diploma in art in 1975 and a graduate diploma in art in 1976. She had initially enrolled as a ceramics major, with a minor in painting and an elected theory subject in philosophy.[3] Two years into her studies, West was increasingly frustrated with her choice of a major. She recalled of that time: "I walked across the corridor to Gold and Silversmithing. I had long been captivated by the showcases of work executed by students of that department. Metal appeared to be the ultimately beguiling facilitator... I was (still am) drawn to the resilience of metal." In her third year of study she moved to stainless steel and titanium, which she used almost exclusively in her graduate diploma year. Says West, "I was also drawn to the potential of small objects as instruments of concentrated power; and, increasingly, to jewellery with its capacity as a personal, social, and cultural cipher."[4]

At RMIT, West studied jewelry design under the German-born and -educated professor Wolf Wennrich, who exposed his students to currents in German jewelry. West recalls his "enthusiasm for the graphic and expressive potential of jewellery," characteristics that can also be found in her earliest work, though by this time, she already had a well-developed aesthetic and sense of self as an artist.[5] From Wennrich, West did become aware, however, of German jewelry artists who were using stainless steel in their own work, such as Fritz Maierhofer. Through Wennrich, she was invited by Fritz Falk, then director of the Schmuckmuseum Pforzheim, to participate in the "Tendenzen '77" exhibition. Falk had originated this series of groundbreaking invitational exhibitions in 1967 to periodically take the pulse of international currents in artistic jewelry.[6] West contributed a series of stainless steel rings, which were

Transient Images, 1979–81
graphite on paper
9 x 13 ¾"
COLLECTION THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON,
HELEN WILLIAMS DRUTT COLLECTION
PHOTO: GEORGE HIXON



Lead Bib, 1982
lead, stainless steel
14 ⅛ x 6 ¾"

displayed alongside works by established talents such as Friedrich Becker, Arline Fisch, Hermann Jünger, Helge Larsen, and Bruno Martinazzi.

West has been fascinated by materials since childhood. Her "persistent curiosity about materials and their cultural and metaphoric resonance," she says, as well as structural and aesthetic potential, led to work with stainless steel and titanium for several years.[7] She cites their comparative lightness and resistance to corrosion and abrasion as being particularly suitable to the jeweler's art.[8] West's brooches of 1978–80 demonstrate her interest in combining stainless steel and titanium with traditional metalsmithing techniques like repoussé and painted motifs.[9] They also reflect her growing fascination with the effect that light has on water—a byproduct of her move to Sydney in 1979 to teach jewelry at the Sydney College of the Arts—and what she describes as the "ambiguously reflective qualities of stainless steel."[10]

"To achieve a discriminating balance between distress and artistry, between desolation and beauty, to sublimate wrath in a quest for a more subtle, elegiac eloquence. More simply: to achieve a discerning balance of paradoxical elements."

A brooch from this period, along with a drawing that informed it, speaks to the artist's multilayered artistic practice. Drawing has consistently been a part of West's process, though its role within her work has evolved over the years. More recently, drawing has become something closer to an obstruction. In a recent blog post, she explained, "I write rather than draw, for the materials of drawing (drawing's matter) often hinder rather than help. They lock me into paper-ness, into the compliance of pencil, the swish of ink or wash."[11] However, early in her career, drawing was a creative act that related to or led to jewelry making. From 1980–82, for example, West completed a series of dark, dense drawings of Sydney's rain-soaked harbor. These drawings directly led to her next major jewelry series: lead "bibs" hanging from steel cables whose forms referenced the protective qualities of the material. She was drawn to lead because of its "paradoxically protective yet toxic nature, its sombre sumptuousness, [and] its alchemical association with gold," she says.[12] West worked on and off with the material for the following ten years, culminating in a series of containers such as caskets and bowls that held objects discreetly within their protective lead linings.

By the early 1980s, West had an established career as a jewelry artist, as well as a lecturing position at the Sydney College of the Arts, which she held until 1999 when she retired from the school as the head of the Jewellery and Object Design Department. In addition to these endeavors, she also began writing seriously, a practice that continues today. West is a well published poet and an

author of numerous treatises on contemporary life and its intersection with art, specifically craft and jewelry. West undertakes her various creative efforts simultaneously. "Always, I am seeking to attain a lyrical toughness: at times fierce, as necessary, yet with a quality of beauty... Both jewellery and poems afford me the possible virtue (as I see it) of succinctness. My poems are made, built rather than written; constructed on the page from shapes and sounds with attentively tuned reverberations. And the attentive tuning of reverberations is a fundamental aspect of my jewellery making."[13]

West's next major series was the "Stones with Steel" necklaces of 1984–1985. On a holiday to the outback of New South Wales, and later on the beaches of Tasmania, West began gathering eye-catching stones whose surfaces felt good to the touch.[14] In the process of storing them in her pant pockets, she noticed that she was trying to balance the weight of the stones, so that one side was not heavier than the other.[15] Ultimately, this concept begat a new series in which West drilled and suspended the stones on steel cables in weight-balanced compositions that hung around the neck. West created more than 30 of these necklaces, each with a different number of stones. She incorporated other materials such as steel or feathers in combination with the stones, thereby offering additional meditations on the concept of weight and balance.

Throughout the late 1980s, West participated in numerous Australian and international jewelry exhibitions that exposed her work to diverse audiences. Highlights from this period include "Schmuckszene '87"; "Four Australian Jewellers," an exhibition that traveled to Canada and the United States featuring West, Kate Durham, Rowena Gough, and Carlier Makigawa; and a show at Electrum Gallery in London. West was also soon honored with a mid-career retrospective titled "Interstices: Works by Margaret West From 1981–1992." The show traveled throughout Australia from 1992 to 1994 and thoroughly exhausted West. She found that as a by-product of the exhibition, she needed a period of reflection. It was during this time that she broke away from her longtime use of lead and turned towards lighter considerations, both emotionally and physically.

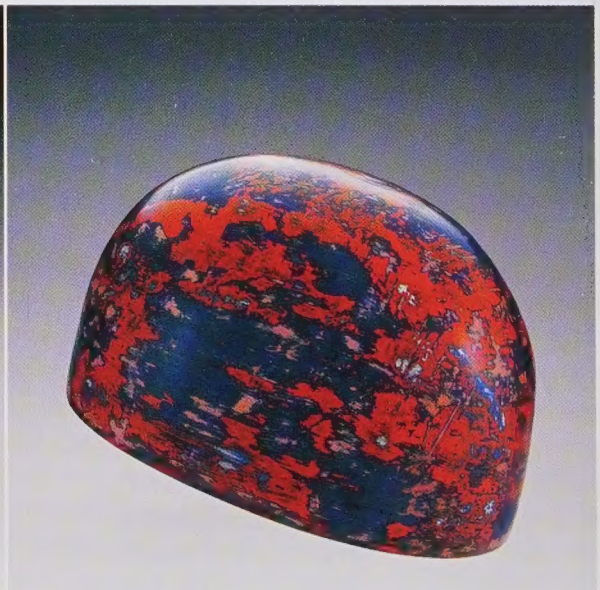
"Always, I am seeking to attain a lyrical toughness: at times fierce, as necessary, yet with a quality of beauty"

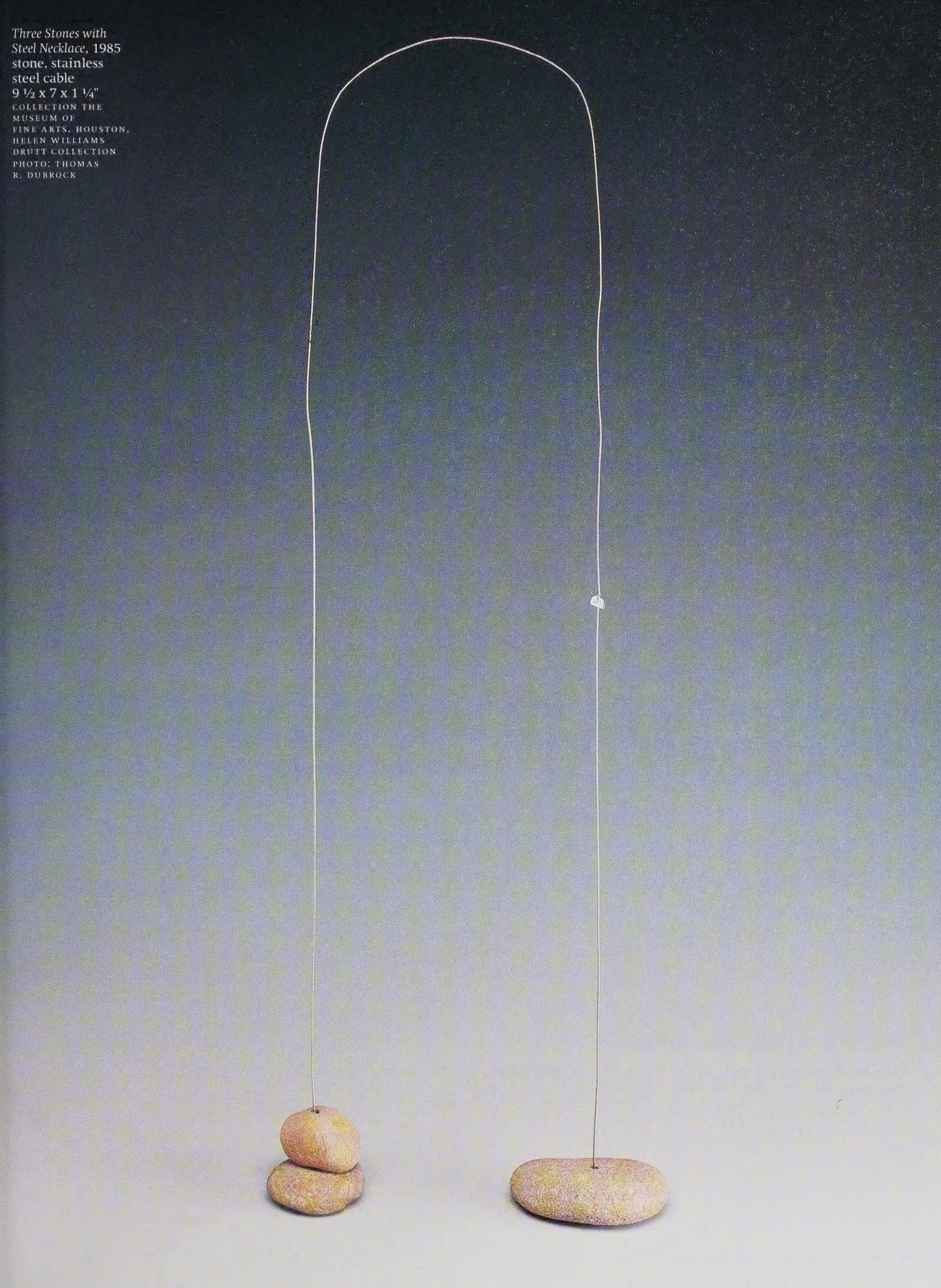
An immediate result of this recalibration was a series of brooches made from balsa wood, whose form and decoration were derived from the artist's observations of daily life. Their shapes deliberately reflected the idea of mountains or hills. West made about 30 of these works, each painted, carved, or otherwise decorated. *Song of the Red Silk Shirt* is representative of this series. Lightweight and seemingly unwearable, it is painted with a glorious cacophony of color and organic pattern. The balsa wood brooches served as an important digression for West in that they provided a break from the heaviness of lead and stone, and their color and pattern allowed her to return to her roots as a painter and student of graphic design.

West has long been a keen observer of nature, in

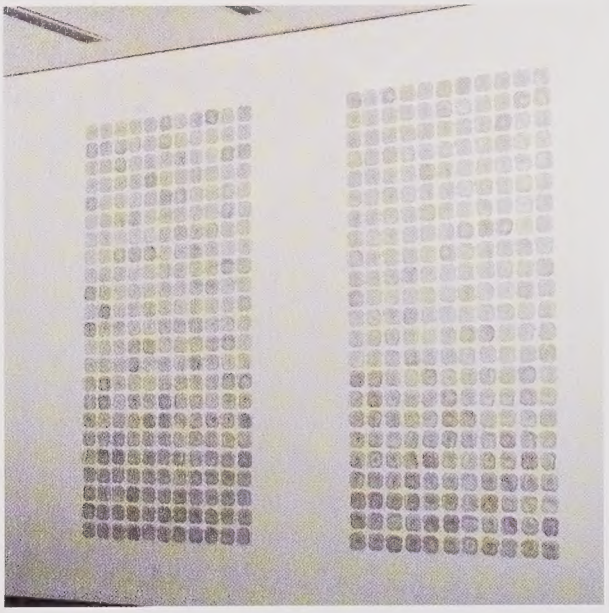
Splash Brooch, 1999
stone, paint, sterling silver
1 ½ x 2 x ¾"
COLLECTION THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON, HELEN WILLIAMS DRUTT COLLECTION
PHOTO: THOMAS R. DUBROCK

Song of the Red Silk Shirt Brooch, 1993
balsa wood, paint, brass
2 ⅞ x 4 ½ x 3"
COLLECTION THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON, HELEN WILLIAMS DRUTT COLLECTION
PHOTO: THOMAS R. DUBROCK

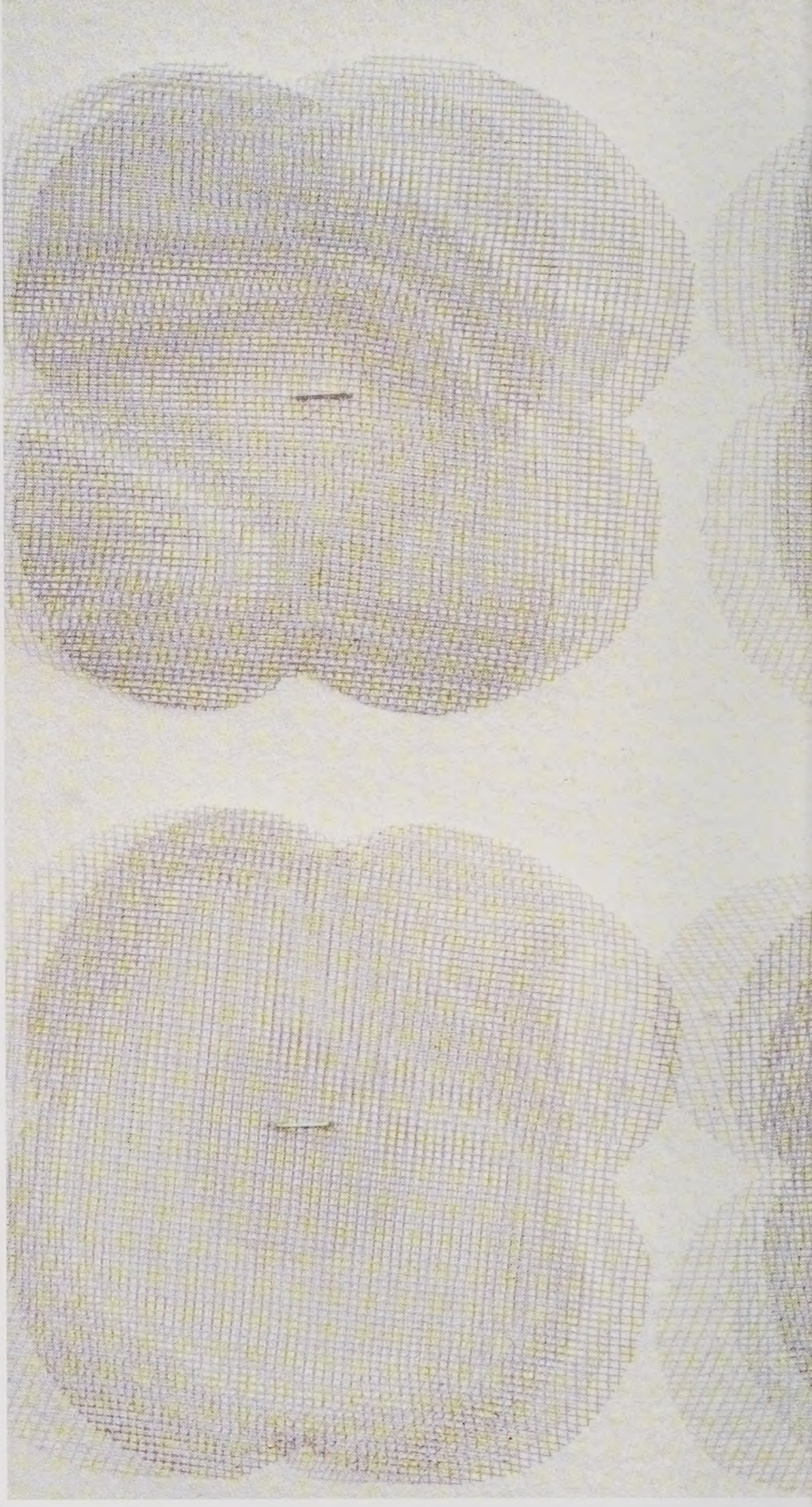




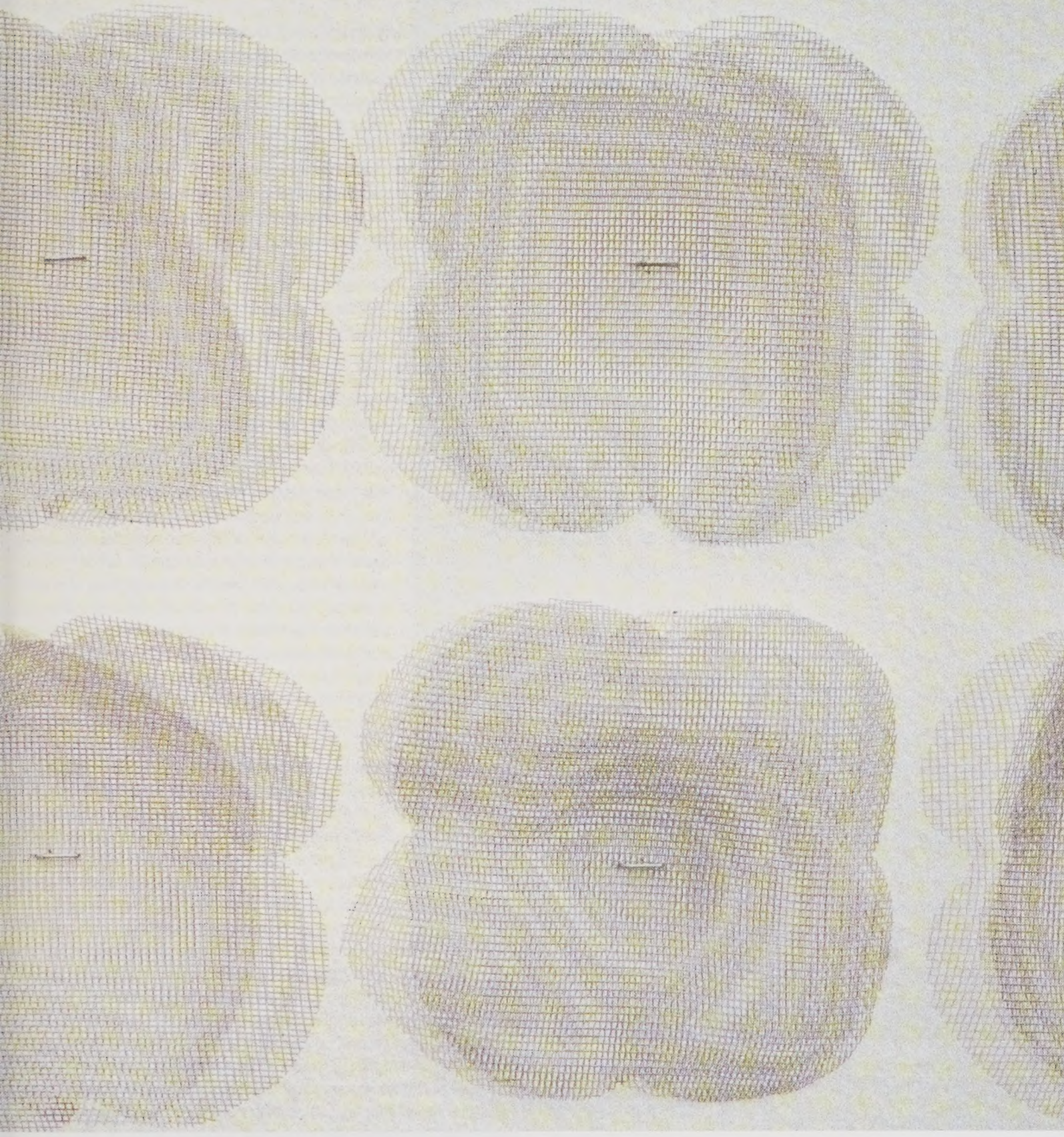
Three Stones with Steel Necklace, 1985
stone, stainless steel cable
9 ½ x 7 x 1 ¼"
COLLECTION THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON, HELEN WILLIAMS DRUTT COLLECTION
PHOTO: THOMAS R. DUBROCK



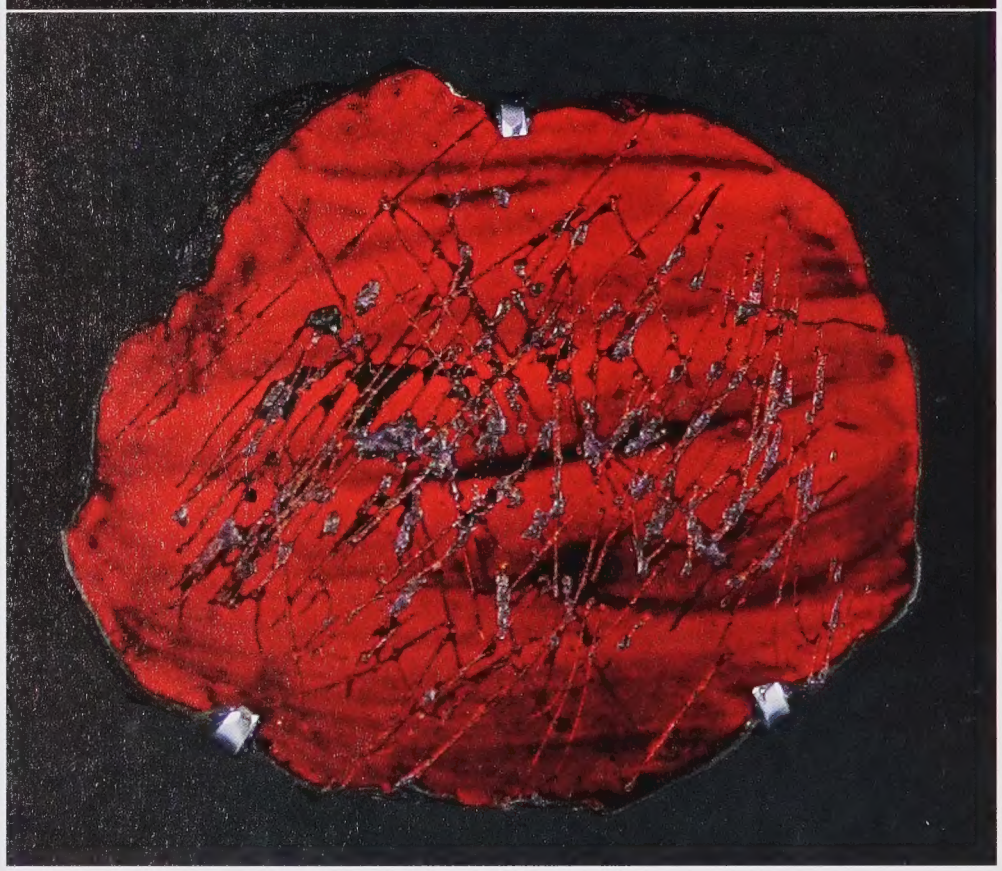
double damask, 2000–01
phosphor bronze mesh and paint units
130 x 150"
COLLECTION THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA
PHOTO: MARGARET WEST



double damask, 2000–01 (detail)



Still Life (natura mortua), 2003
stone, paint, graphite, wax (detail)



Rosa Caduca, from "Fatal Flowers" series, 2004
basalt, paint, silver
1 ½ x 1 ⅞ x ⅜"

particular of clouds and flowers. During her period of respite that led to the balsa wood brooches, she began photographing clouds around Sydney. She had hoped that the wood brooches would provide an opportunity for her to engage their wispy and airy shapes.[16] Instead, she turned to carving and painting stone, acknowledging both the irony of using such a solid, weighty material for a series based on air, and the affinity between the imagery of constellations of clouds in the sky and flowers in a garden.[17] "Notes: the sky is a garden," a series of painted stone brooches made from 1998 to 2000, resulted. Comprised of amorphous cloud-flower forms painted in vibrant colors on natural stones, the series offers a celebratory vision of the world.

West's art from the late 1990s onwards has used, almost exclusively, the flower form. As her perspective progressed from series to series, the flowers transmuted, both in rendering and message. After the optimism of "Notes: the sky is a garden," the flowers took on the role of referencing traditional women's work, in the monumental wall installation *double damask* from 2000–2001. Comprised of 506 four-petal damask roses made from bronze mesh and embellished with paint, the composition has been compared to a highly regimented rose garden, as well as a traditional rose-patterned, double-sided damask tablecloth.[18] On a basic level, mesh is highly malleable and allows for light to penetrate the individual elements and create shadows on the wall. Yet it also offers additional layers of meaning. West wrote that metal mesh "weaves a world in emulation of the virtual with its mathematical precision, its logical configuration as an archetypical grid, its ordered representation of the binary, digitized world…To add to the complexity, there are the magical effects of moiré created when one layer of mesh crosses another, or intersects with its shadow—an effect which changes with even a slight movement of the viewer's head as reality swims in an illusion of shadows and digits—leaving both view and viewer utterly pixilated."[19]

After the success of *double damask*, West continued to make objects that were not technically jewelry (but which were informed by her jewelry) such as *Still Life (natura mortua)* from 2003.[20] A floor installation consisting of 1,240 individual stone flowers placed within the structure of a

As an artist who has consistently questioned the role and value of jewelry in society throughout her career, the international political situation brought forth profound observations on jewelry's capability, and perhaps the need, to embrace the realities, however uncomfortable, of the world.

grid, the work was initially designed to celebrate the optimism that the new millennium engendered. However, over the course of its two-year production, world events took a negative turn, and West incorporated her feelings of distress and concern into the work by segueing from brightly painted flowers to darker, more somber surface hues. In addition, West's working notes state that some of the flowers are refined, carefully formed, and intact, while the later ones were worn, chipped, or fractured.[21] This transition of style also dovetails with her shift towards suffering rather than optimism—a role that flowers continue to represent for the artist today.

West's discomfort with the increasingly difficult, inescapable news about war has continued to manifest itself in her work. As an artist who has consistently questioned the role and value of jewelry in society throughout her career, the international political situation brought forth profound observations on jewelry's capability, and perhaps the need, to embrace the realities, however uncomfortable, of the world. This darker outlook manifested itself in the *Fatal Flowers* series of brooches from 2004. The series focuses on the imagery of war, particularly wounds and the wounded—the real, fleshy, gut-wrenching kind—as well as the idea of wounding someplace or someone. Once again, West turned to flowers to embody these meanings, creating brooches from stone and paint. In describing *Fatal Flowers*, she recently wrote, "The rhetoric of the wound is persuasive; flowers speak with complex and beguiling voices; stone is implacable. Now flesh has become stone – stone that has been cut, abraded, fractured, bruised, burnt. Now, even the stones are bleeding."[22]

In recent years, West has come full circle with her flower brooches. While she continued to plumb the dark images of war, in particular the photographs of Abu Ghraib, for *FRIEZE: ecce homo (précis)* of 2005, an installation of more than 50 brooches made from painted Cararra marble, as well as two additional series based on war in 2006 and 2008, she has recently retreated from the emotional drain of focusing on such desolate subjects. She is still using flowers as a main form or motif— they are clearly an enduring source of meaning for her— but her focus has shifted towards quieter interpretations that do not cause the soul to ache about the atrocities of the world. The future has once again turned hopeful.

Cindi Strauss is curator of Modern and Contemporary Decorative Arts and Design at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

1. Margaret West, lecture transcript, "The Flower in the Wound: Situations & Reflections," Presented at the SITUATION workshop in Gothenberg, Sweden, August 30–September 4, 2004.
2. Margaret West, email correspondence with the author, April 19, 2009. West describes her teaching as a life-changing experience.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. A total of five exhibitions comprised the "Tendenzen" series, which occurred between 1967 and 1982.
7. West, email correspondence with author, April 19, 2009.
8. Margaret West, email correspondence with the author, May 28, 2009. West also questions the public's value system when judging metals and precious gemstones such as diamonds. She strongly believes that the manner in which these precious materials are mined compromises their integrity.
9. West also made neckpieces from stainless steel and titanium during this period. For a discussion of an example in the Helen Williams Drutt Collection, see Cindi Strauss, *Ornament as Art: Avant-Garde Jewelry from the Helen Williams Drutt Collection* (Stuttgart, Germany and Houston, Texas: Arnoldsche Art Publishers and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), pp. 330–331.
10. West, email correspondence with Strauss, April 19, 2009.
11. Margaret West, http://www.klimt02.net/blogs/blog.php?Id=5&Id_post=2&Directe=Si.
12. West, email correspondence with author, April 19, 2009.
13. Ibid.
14. West, email correspondence with author, May 28, 2009.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Robert Bell, "Margaret West," in *Material Culture: Aspects of Contemporary Australian Craft and Design* (Canberra: The National Gallery of Australia, 2002), p. 73.
19. Margaret West, "Views and Vignettes," in *Scenes from Still Life: Catherine Rogers and Margaret West* (Emu Plains, New South Wales: Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest, 2008), p. 38.
20. This work was made as part of the Clemenger Contemporary Art Award exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria.
21. Jason Smith, "Margaret West," in *3+3=1, Three Voices, Three Continents, One World: Kristina Riska, Margaret West, Paula Winokur* (Helsinki: Designmuseo, 2005), p. 24.
22. Margaret West, "Fatal Flowers," in *Kristina Riska, Margaret West, Paula Winokur* (Helsinki: Designmuseo, 2005), n.p.

The Brass Age
Metalwork of the Aesthetic Movement

BY ANNA TOBIN D'AMBROSIO

WEAPONS, MACHINERY, and household details such as candlesticks, andirons, and escutcheons: these were typical uses for industrial metals at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Between 1840 and 1890, however, manufacturers adopted a more creative use of metals in the fabrication of decorative arts. By mid century, classically shaped cast-iron urns and ornate garden benches became focal points in elaborate Victorian gardens. Metal furniture moved indoors, in the form of wirework plant stands and intricate cast-iron hallstands, terrariums, parlor safes, and novel seating furniture; cast-iron stoves also became increasingly decorative.

During the 1880s an innovative and more ostentatious application of industrial metals to decorative arts—"art brass," or "artistic bronze goods"—captivated the style-conscious American middle- and upper-class consumer. Visually and materially complex art brass products varied from select chandeliers to costly pieces of furniture to trendy accessories of patinated metals.[1] The wares were predominantly brass (a fusion of copper and zinc), but sometimes bronze (traditionally copper and tin) or an amalgam of metal parts that included brass, copper, German silver (copper, nickel, and sometimes zinc), or other alloys with silver, gold, or copper electroplate or a chemically created patina (FIG. 1). Colorful ceramics, glass prisms, or lush fabrics frequently highlighted the objects.

The beauty of a brass finish, with its simulation of gilding and its ease of production, made brass an exceedingly popular industrial metal from which to create household accessories. In *Industrial History of the United States* (1879), Albert Bolles champions the properties of brass:

> Brass is as agreeable a metal to work as pure silver. In thin plates it can be stamped and embossed in any form. It spins up beautifully in a lathe. It can be drawn out into delicate wire; and is so malleable, that it can be beaten out almost like gold leaf itself for the purposes of cheap gilding. The metal is susceptible of a high polish. It does not rust by exposure, and has a great deal of the beauty of gold. It is the universal material of which chandeliers and gas-fixtures are made; being susceptible of rich coloring, bronzing, and silvering by chemical processes, and of shaping into the most elaborate forms by stamping and embossing.[2]

The history of art brass incorporates two separate but parallel metals manufacturing industries: base metals (alloys such as brass and bronze) and luxury metals (gold, silver, and platinum). Each relied on similar technology and drew from common design foundations. New York City and the Connecticut towns of Meriden and Waterbury and their environs were the main centers of art brass production. Although Connecticut did not possess the natural resources to support the brass industry, with its access to ports, a strong fuel supply (water power and fuel

FIG. 5
Ansonia Brass & Copper Company with Longwy Faience Company
Table, ca. 1883
brass, earthenware
31 ¾ x 13 ⅛ x 15 ¼"
COLLECTION MARGIE AND MICHAEL LOEB

During the 1880s an innovative and more ostentatious application of industrial metals to decorative arts—"art brass," or "artistic bronze goods"—captivated the style-conscious American middle- and upper-class consumer.

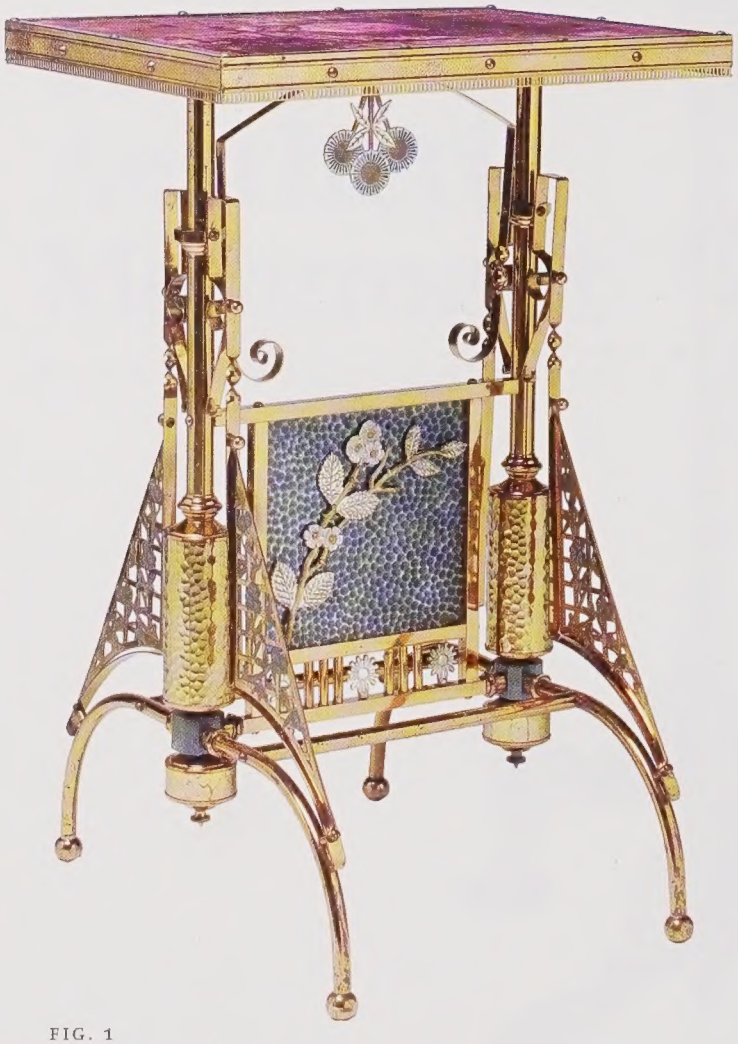


FIG. 1
The Charles Parker Co.
Table, ca, 1885
brass, silver and other metallic plates, iron, other metals, original fabric
29 x 19 x 17 ½"
COLLECTION MUNSON-WILLIAMS-PROCTOR ARTS INSTITUTE, MUSEUM OF ART, UTICA, NEW YORK

for steam boilers), a monopoly on the skilled workforce, and a quickly developed railroad system, it became its American center.[3] The adoption of kerosene and gas lighting expanded the market for brass tubing, parts, and fixtures.[4] By 1880 there were 42 brass manufacturers in Connecticut with nearly 6,000 employees. This total does not account for associated businesses such as hardware, lamp, and clock manufacturers. Waterbury, dominated by the industry, became known as "Brass City."

Industrial advances contributed to the growth of the brass trade. The second half of the nineteenth century was a salient period for the development of machinery and techniques that made it easier to form and ornament metals, which in turn made it simple and cost-effective to reproduce fashionable accessories and larger furnishings. From the late 1870s through the 1880s, numerous patents were granted for pioneering methods of decorating metals, including equipment for creating patterns or raised ornamentation on metallic surfaces. Further innovations consisted of methods for coloring metals, ornamenting bronze, and cleaning and lacquering brass.

Technological developments emerged at a time when American designers moved toward a new mode and set of tenets, the Aesthetic Movement, initiated in England as a reaction to industrialization and the mass-produced, superfluously ornamented goods of the day. Proponents of the movement sought to elevate the status of everyday objects by fusing art and labor in the creation of utilitarian wares. Aesthetic-style art brass objects illustrate the multiple influences that pervaded the Movement. Among these sources are Bruce Talbert (1838–81), a British architect and designer, and a leading proponent of a reformed Gothic style called Modern Gothic; Christopher Dresser (1834–1904), one of the most prominent reformers and designers of his time who promulgated two-dimensional abstracted floral motifs as well as Japanese designs; and an amalgam of Near and Middle Eastern cultures and Japanese arts. Most Aesthetic-style goods share basic characteristics: two-dimensional surface ornamentation (often compartmentalized), artful craftsmanship, and decoration derived from nature.[5]

With their combination of industrial components, stylized and exotic motifs, and complex finishes, art brass goods united the artistic with the useful. As a writer in *Crockery and Glass Journal* explained in 1884, "Add to this its durable qualities as an article of use, the art that keeps it from tarnishing, and the multitudinous and beautiful forms into which it has been wrought of late, and the reason [for] the present rage for brass will at once be appearing."[6]

Japanese arts, especially metal wares, were among the most potent inspirations for art brass goods. The asymmetrical, naturalistic decoration of fruits, flowers, vines, birds, and insects in Japanese art grew in favor in the West during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. There had been a solid but limited market for Japanese decorative arts, until their appearance at

FIG. 2
Attributed to Reed & Barton
Clock, ca. 1880
patinated copper, silver, brass,
other metals, fiber rope
10 ½ x 10 ½"
COLLECTION MUNSON-WILLIAMS-PROCTOR ARTS
INSTITUTE, MUSEUM OF ART, UTICA, NEW YORK

FIG. 3
Bradley & Hubbard Mfg. Co
Sconce, ca. 1885
patinated copper, silver plate, glass, other metal
17 5/8 x 13 x 4 ¾"
COLLECTION ROBERT TUGGLE AND PAUL JEROMACK

international expositions in the 1860s and 1870s created an unprecedented demand for "things Japanese." In America, firms such as Tiffany & Co. (1837 to present) and A.A. Vantine (1869 to ca. 1940) retailed Japanese wares, but it was not until the Centennial Exhibition in 1876 that the American public embraced them. In his descriptive account of the Centennial, J.S. Ingram explained, "It is not strange that the Japanese department was one of the main centers of attraction, and the delight of lovers of the serious and the bizarre.... Of all that was wonderful and beautiful in the Exhibition, the Japanese exhibit was certainly not the least bewildering and beautiful."[7]

At the Centennial, Japanese mixed-metal artistic goods captivated American designers who admired the motifs and the use of base and mixed metals that Western craftsmen had not previously considered suitable for high-style decorative arts. The success of mixed metal and silver objects in the Japanese taste created by Emile-August Reiber (1826–93) of France for the Parisian retailer Orfèvrerie Christofle (1830 to present) and by Tiffany & Co. and Gorham Manufacturing Company (founded 1831 to present) in the United States, provided encouragement to other American metals firms to create similar merchandise, thus contributing to the popularization of the use of alloys and polychrome surfaces.[8]

To imitate Japanese metals, American manufacturers adopted the use of less expensive materials, such as copper that was chemically patinated to produce a rich, deep surface color. To this ground, naturalistic motifs executed in silver or plated metal were mounted in Japanese-style asymmetrical patterns (FIG. 2). In 1881 Gorham was among the first American firms to market an adventuresome line of patinated copper wares effectively.[9] By 1882, the *Jewelers' Circular and Horological Review* noted: "Copper predominates, and is very fashionable; in hammered designs the colors are dark warm reds of finest polish, mellowing into yellowish browns; scales and shadings like shapeless lichens, wine-tinted."[10] The success of patinated copper by highly regarded makers helped fuel the growing popularity of brass and copper with plated ornamentation as materials from which to fabricate larger decorative arts. Bradley & Hubbard Manufacturing (Meriden, CT, active 1854–1940) possessed the technology and equipment to follow the trend effortlessly. Because art brass was only a minor component of their overall sales, the firm could experiment with finishes and interchangeable parts to create novel forms, such as the patinated copper sconce in figure 3, or more traditional decorative objects, such as the clock in figure 4.

Numerous manufacturers took advantage of the "facility of art expression" embodied in brass to create furnishings that united the most current metal production technology with the latest vogue in decorative arts.

FIG. 6
Maker Unknown
Easel, ca. 1885
brass
71 x 23 ½"
COLLECTION MUNSON-WILLIAMS-PROCTOR ARTS INSTITUTE, MUSEUM OF ART, UTICA, NEW YORK

It employs an architectural, Moorish-inspired dome and asymmetrical, Japanese-derived floral elements within a silver-plated ground.

Numerous manufacturers took advantage of the "facility of art expression"[11] embodied in brass to create furnishings that united the most current metal production technology with the latest vogue in decorative arts. Concurrently, style-conscious American homeowners turned their attention to these ornate metal wares as a means for updating domestic settings. These objects represent a unique moment in the union of artistic expression and technology. A table attributed to Bradley & Hubbard (FIG. 5), illustrates how American art brass objects successfully blended machine technology with the overall form and motifs of the Aesthetic Movement. The table is composed of tubular brass (a strong and lightweight material) and cast and spun elements fastened together by brass screws. Polychromatic ceramics, textured details, and light-diffusing surfaces counterbalance sharp angles. Compartmentalized geometric reductions of plant life dominate the pierced rim around the top and the cylindrical sections of the body. The stippled background surrounding the shiny surface of the decoration intensifies the reflective qualities. The botanical ornamentation, including the radial flowers sprouting below the tabletop, contrasts with the reductionist characteristics of the mass-produced object. To this fusion are added Gothic elements in the legs, colorful French ceramics with a Moorish flavor, and exotic serpent forms on either side of the ceramic cylinder. Overall, the table illustrates fastidious attention to design and construction.

FIG. 4
Bradley & Hubbard Mfg. Co.
Clock, ca. 1880-85
brass, silver plate, other metals
16 ½ x 10 x 6 ¼"
COLLECTION ROBERT TUGGLE AND PAUL JEROMACK

As remarkably innovative expressions of the creative fervor that marked the Aesthetic Movement, art metals complemented complex interiors, helped express an owner's sense of contemporary fashion, and fulfilled the domestic prerequisite of a cultured home. The variety of forms, patterns, and ornamentation in the textured, patinated, and plated surfaces of these wares took advantage of the illuminating character of brass and, perhaps, contributed an image of erudition and, in some cases, exoticism to room décor. As the *Crockery and Glass Journal* noted, "The simple beauty and neatness of polished brass . . . is of itself a sufficient guarantee that it will be, as it ought, a lasting favorite in popular taste."[12] Despite the apparent ease with which novel brass forms could be generated, high-end art brass goods, with varied finishes and ornamentation, were relatively costly. Brass furniture, therefore, was generally used as an accent piece.

Every aspect of decorative arts was integrated in "artistic" interiors in the 1880s. Carefully selected accent furniture and accessories paraded on walls, shelving, mantels, or sideboards were important room components, and metals manufacturers responded to the mania for the Aesthetic taste. Brass companies, taking advantage of the intrinsic qualities of the metals, produced all types of accessories such as clocks, lighting fixtures, chairs and other furniture (FIG. 6). The breadth of choices in candlesticks alone—from figurative, to a machine-aesthetic (FIG. 7), to elegant candelabra ornamented with floral motifs and festooned with brass drops (FIG. 8)—could overwhelm a consumer. Likewise, mirrors and mirrored sconces came in an exceptionally large number of configurations, from lacy Moorish-influenced patterns to patinated confections. Firms like Charles Parker Manufacturing (active 1832–1957), one of the largest and most diversified of all the businesses that produced art brass goods, used interchangeable parts to create an extensive selection of accent furniture, the finish and details of which could be easily customized with the application of patinas, gilding, or extra decorative flourishes. The table in figure 1 and the hanging shelf in figure 9, which survive in remarkable condition, showcase Parker's typical combination of texture and color. The original reddish-purple silk velvet tabletop complements the warm hue of the metal surfaces. The floral element below the top is silvered with bronze-colored flower centers and stems. The cast, blossoming tree twig decorating the central panel is highlighted by tones of silver and gold, and is set against the textured and intentionally oxidized silver-plated surface. A surprising dash of color is found on the lattice-motif brackets that flank the legs. Entwined cherry blossoms enhance the reticulated pattern and are finished

FIG. 7
Maker unknown
Candelabrum, ca. 1880-90
brass, glass
9 5/8 x 9 1/2 x 7"
COLLECTION ROBERT TUGGLE AND PAUL JEROMACK

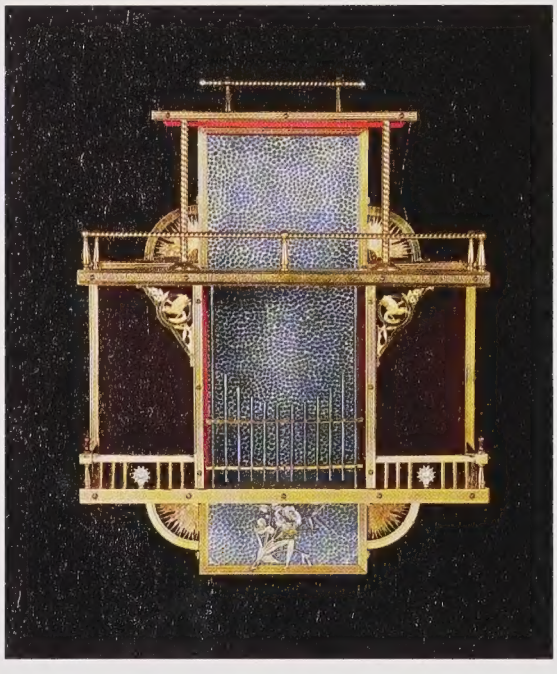


FIG. 9
The Charles Parker Co.
Hanging shelf, ca. 1880–85
brass, silver and other metallic plates, iron, other metals, wood, fabric
33 1/4 x 26 1/4 x 7 5/8"
COLLECTION MUNSON-WILLIAMS-PROCTOR ARTS INSTITUTE, MUSEUM OF ART, UTICA, NEW YORK

in overpaint of pink, bronze, and green, a rare survival.

Tastemakers and interior designers emphasized the creation of artful, unified domestic settings, and they underscored in particular the use of reflective surfaces and metal accessories as integral elements. In 1884 a writer for the *Crockery and Glass Journal* extolled the virtues of brass furniture and accessories, especially lighting. "The old idea of solidity and massiveness has been dropped and has yielded all along the line to airy lightness, grace, and delicacy of form," declared the author. "Particularly . . . chandeliers, hall and library lamps and their trimmings" mark the current "revolution in art brass."[13]

The advent of kerosene as a fuel source in the 1850s yielded a less expensive, brighter-burning, safer, and cleaner fuel, and an array of kerosene lighting fixtures were introduced to meet the demand. In the early 1880s, companies quickly moved away from the historic revival styles that had dominated the 1850s and 1860s to the newly favored abstracted floral imagery of the period. Brass and mixed metal kerosene lamps were made in seemingly endless variants. Consumers could choose from various materials (metal or ceramic bodies), forms (ovoid, rectangular, urn-shaped, sculptural), and styles (including flat abstracted interpretations of nature or cast, three-dimensional ornamentation) (FIG. 10) or finishes (surfaces referred to as "antiqued silver, enameled bronze, polished bronze, or royal copper").[14]

While technological advances in central heating made the hearth area less necessary as a source of heat and light, it remained a visual and symbolic focal point in many residences. The home was viewed as an escape from an increasingly industrialized world, and authors on domestic interiors fostered the association of the hearth with strong family values and tradition. The reflective qualities and inherent strength of brass made it a natural material for fireplace fenders, andirons, and fire tools (FIG. 11).

Rooms with ornamental wall and ceiling treatments in the reform taste relied not only on stylish furniture and accessories to complement them, but also on smaller accents including doorknobs, handles, lock sets, and hinges.[15] A number of American companies that manufactured builders' hardware included lines of "artistic house fittings." This hardware was made in comprehensive sets, so that each detail would be in harmony. Doorknobs had compatible hinges, rosettes, and doorplates. The motifs drew on more literal interpretations of Anglo-Japanesque design vocabulary, integrating architecture and figures. Russell & Erwin Manufacturing (active 1839–1902) was one of the first to patent Japanesque door hardware patterns. As early as 1879 Henry Russell took out a design patent on a doorknob with the image of a geisha holding a parasol (FIG. 12). Other offerings included door sets with motifs of figures holding lanterns set within an architectural framework (FIG. 13)

For a brief period in America's history, the hunger for art brass seemed insatiable, and large manufacturers offered an abundance of objects and designs to satisfy that appetite.

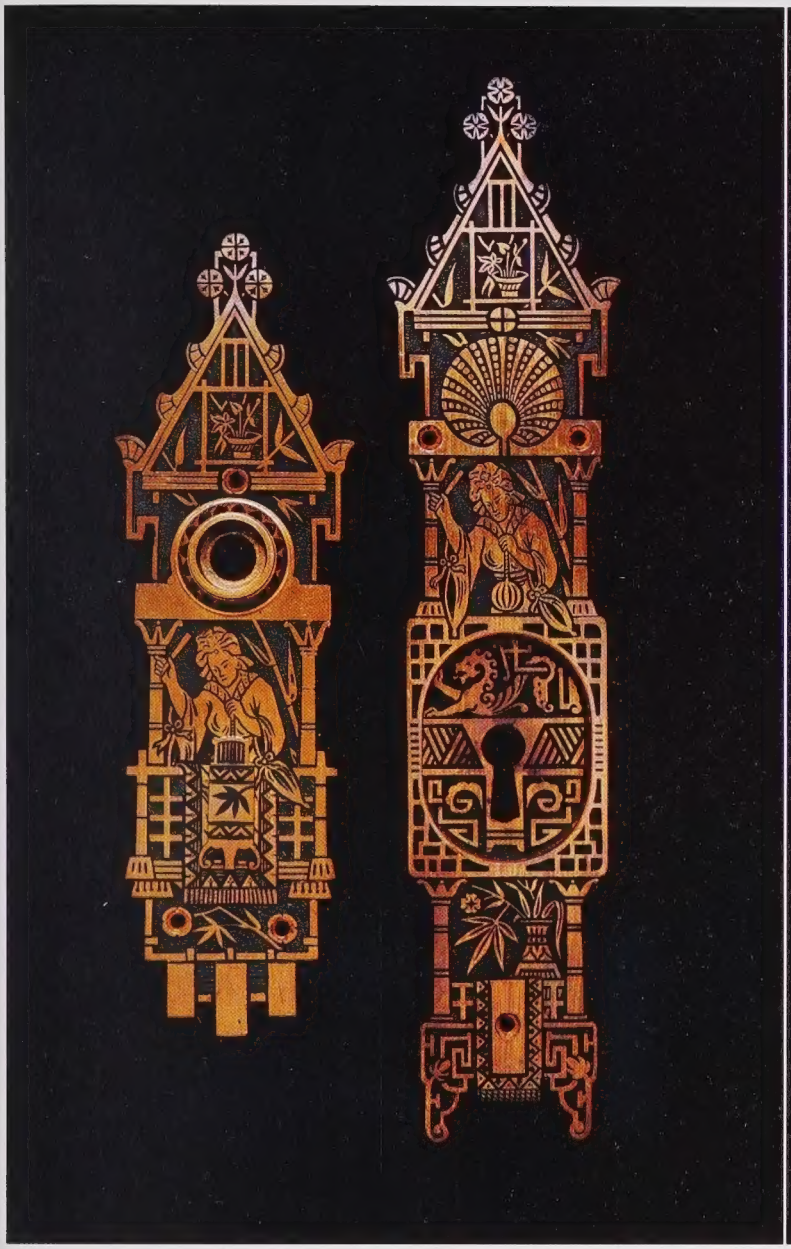


FIG. 13
Designed by Rodolphe Christesen
Russell & Erwin Mfg. Co.
Escutcheon and Sliding Door Escutcheon, ca. 1880
bronze
8 5/8 x 2 1/2 x 5/8" and 11 1/2 x 2 1/8 x 5/8"
COLLECTION ROBERT TUGGLE AND PAUL JEROMACK

FIG. 12
Designed by Henry E. Russell, Jr.
Russell & Erwin Mfg. Co.
Doorknobs, ca. 1879
bronze
approx. 2 1/4" diameter
COLLECTION ROBERT TUGGLE
AND PAUL JEROMACK

Tastemakers and interior designers emphasized the creation of artful, unified domestic settings, and they underscored in particular the use of reflective surfaces and metal accessories as integral elements.

By the beginning of the 1890s, the fashion embodied by art brass was replaced by the newly emerging styles of Arts & Crafts, Art Nouveau, and Beaux Arts. Art brass, however, had helped set the stage for modern decorative arts by introducing industrial materials in the creation of decorative household goods.

Anna Tobin D'Ambrosio, Assistant Director and Curator of Decorative Arts at the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute Museum of Art, Utica, New York, served as curator and catalogue author of A Brass Menagerie: Metalwork of the Aesthetic Movement, *(2005) from which this article is abridged.*

ALL PHOTOS: JOHN BIGELOW TAYLOR, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

FIG. 10
R. Hollings & Co. with
J. and J. G. Low Art Tile Works
Floor Lamp, ca. 1886
brass, bronze, silver plate,
earthenware, glass
66 x 21 ¼ x 21 ¼"
COLLECTION MUNSON-WILLIAMS-
PROCTOR ARTS INSTITUTE,
MUSEUM OF ART, UTICA, NEW YORK

FIG. 11
Designed by William C. Peet
J. L. Mott Iron Works
Andirons, ca. 1882
brass
22 ¼ x 10 ⅛ x 18 ½"
COLLECTION THE NEWARK MUSEUM, NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

FIG. 8
Maker unknown
Candelabras, ca. 1880
brass, glass, cast iron
17 x 10 ⅝ x 4 ⅝" (each)
COLLECTION BARRIE AND DEEDEE WIGMORE

1. Some firms used the terms to refer only to small decorative arts, but for the sake of this essay the broader context is applied. Many brass manufacturers concentrated their businesses on one facet of metal goods—beds, lighting, fireplace accoutrements, or smaller accessories. More commonly, a variety of objects were produced by one firm using the same technology and, in some cases, the same decorative components. Lighting is, at times, listed by firms as a separate category from "art brass goods," but it is included here inasmuch as lighting incorporates identical motifs and was sold parallel to art brass accessories. Only one or two firms researched for this aarticle, however, made brass beds, so they are not addressed here. Many brass manufacturers also made a line of brass or bronze domestic statues, which are not considered here.
2. Albert S. Bolles, *Industrial History of the United States, from the Earliest Settlements to the Present time: A Complete Survey of American Industries . . .* (Norwich, CT: Henry Bill Publishing Company, 1879), p. 343.
3. The development of the brass industry in Connecticut is well documented. For more in-depth information, see William G. Lathrop, *The Brass Industry in the United States: A Study of the Origin and the Development of the Brass Industry in the Naugatuck Valley and Its Subsequent Extension over the Nation* (Mount Carmel, CT: William G. Lathrop, 1926) and Michael John Everett, "External Economies and Inertia: The Rise and Decline of the Naugatuck Valley Brass Industry," (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1997). Also see Cecelia Bucki, et al., *Metal, Minds and Machines: Waterbury at Work* (Waterbury, CT: Mattatuck Historical Society, 1980).
4. Bucki, et al., p. 27.
5. For a complete exploration of the Aesthetic Movement in America, see Doreen Bolger Burke et al., *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986).
6. "Brass and Lamp Goods," *The Crockery and Glass Journal* 19, 9 (February 28, 1884), p. 18.
7. J. S. Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition, Described and Illustrated Being a Concise and Graphic Description of the Grand Enterprise, Commemorative of the First Century of American Independence . . . the Whole, Profusely Illustrated* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers, 1876), p. 559. Another aspect of Japanese work that drew exceptional attention was the ceramics display. "The collection of pottery and porcelain," noted Susan N. Carter when reporting on the Centennial, "which most powerfully impresses the imagination of the American visitor to the Exhibition, both from its pompous splendor and the multiplicity of articles is that of Japan." Many of the ceramics were made specifically for sale to the western market, often adapting Asian motifs to western forms.
8. For a more detailed discussion, see Charles Venable, *Silver in America, 1840-1940: A Century of Splendor* (Dallas, Dallas Museum of Art, 1995), pp. 172-176.
9. Charles Carpenter, *Gorham Silver* (San Francisco: Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, 1997), p. 92.
10. Ibid. The article was first published in the *Jewelers' Circular and Horological Review* (January 1882) and subsequently quoted in an autumn 1882 Gorham Company catalogue.
11. "Brass and Lamp Goods," p. 18.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Bradley & Hubbard Manufacturing Co., *Illustrated Catalogue of Bronze Metal Parlor Lamps, with Detachable Seamless Metal Founts* (Meriden, CT: Bradley & Hubbard Manufacturing Co., 1885). Collection of the Department of Drawings and Prints, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
15. I would like to acknowledge scholar Nina Gray who researched and wrote the entries on door hardware firms for the catalogue *A Brass Menagerie: Metalwork of the Aesthetic Movement.*

Reviews

The Miniature Worlds of Bruce Metcalf

The Mint Museum
of Craft + Design,
Charlotte, North Carolina
February 21–May 17, 2009

by Kate Dobbs Ariail

This traveling exhibition of Bruce Metcalf's work is a potent reminder of the importance of curated shows to the general understanding of any artist's work. Whether putting the artist into the context of history, or into that of his time, beside his contemporaries, or—as in this case—putting individual works into the context of the artist's oeuvre, a curated exhibition, more than a gallery show, encourages the viewer to think in terms of themes and purposes. One can evaluate the pieces on their particular merits, but also in relation the artist's achievement of his larger, underlying, expressive goals. This is useful in the case of Metcalf's work: a single piece may baffle, even repel; a room full of them fascinates, and sometimes delights.

"The Miniature Worlds of Bruce Metcalf" was curated by Signe Mayfield and organized by the Palo Alto Art Center, where it opened in September 2008, before beginning a six-venue national tour at the Mint Museum of Craft + Design. Since the exhibition excludes larger-scaled, less narrative work, it is not quite a mid-career retrospective, but it is close. Metcalf has been concerned with storytelling at a tiny scale since he first took up metalsmithing at Syracuse University as a student, and "Miniature Worlds" includes six dozen choice examples from more than 30 years of work. The preponderance of the pieces were made in the 1990s and represent the artist at full maturity; a few earlier examples attest to the longevity of his visual and philosophical concerns. Also on view are several related sketchbook pages, and some of the designs therein have been writ large upon the gallery walls, in an amusing reversal of the objects' miniaturization.

The artist who wants to tell stories with stationary objects must be canny. He must be theatrical: he must exploit the most dramatic, most emblematic moment of the story, and build its dynamism into every visual relationship in his artwork. Metcalf excels at this, and often literally puts his work on stage, building architectural settings for the animated figures of his brooches—the world they live in when not traveling as ornaments on human bodies. The relationship of the figure to its setting communicates a great deal of the object's emotional tone, although the figures' expressive faces and gesturing limbs are powerful on their own.

Sentry Box I, 1990 (left)
Sentry Box II, 1990 (right)
sterling silver, gold leaf, paint, wood
both height 4 ¾"
COURTESY SIENNA GALLERY

Overgrown, 1993
sterling silver, copper, paint
4 x 2"

One of the show's strongest groups is a freestanding series of plant-headed people running loose in the world with sharp implements in their tiny hands. Metcalf's little characters are all doing something, and they are doing it by hand. In almost every scene, the action—the drama—is generated or controlled by the hand, in an apt visual metaphor for the craftworker's philosophy of life. Nearly all the figures, housed or not, are holding something, or else their hands have morphed into some conspicuous other form, like bear claws, that hint at potential actions. In a few, the figure's hands are grossly deformed or bandaged. I found these almost too painful to look at, far more so than the figures' monstrous heads.

Metcalf's application of the techniques and attitudes of cartooning and the numerous European architectural and art-historical references in his work, have been much discussed, but another useful comparison might be to Japanese carved netsuke, both historical and recent. Metcalf himself titled a 1982 show at Kent State "Pictures from the Floating World," and the Japanese traditions of printmaking and netsuke carving (and through them, the powerful imagery of Noh theater) from the Edo period onward seem to inform Metcalf's very

contemporary American art. Certainly, we see an obsession with monsters in both netsuke and Metcalf's similarly scaled miniature sculptures, along with the theatrical presentation of the telling moment, and a stunning perfection of craft.

Netsuke—carved toggles—originated in the late sixteenth century as a way to secure suspended bags or containers from the obi (sash) of a kimono, as those garments have no pockets. Like the art jewelry of today, they were fashion accessories, and were used to convey qualities wearers wished to project as their own. Fantasy and the fantastic have always been associated with netsuke, and the earliest were valued for their "strangeness," which indicated the wearer's worldliness.[1] There are many styles, but netsuke often represent demons, ghosts, monsters, and mythic characters engaged in some sort of struggle, and some of them look remarkably like Bruce Metcalf's tormented, goggle-eyed creatures. The contorted form in Metcalf's *Sentry Box II* could be directly descended from *Moxibustion Patient in Agony*, a bizarre little figure by Hara Shugetsu, who worked in the mid-nineteenth century.[2] Much contemporary netsuke, which is purely visual rather than functional, compares easily with Metcalf's work in the way it zeroes in on the decisive or particularly symbolic moment in a narrative, or depicts something that provokes us to create a story around the image.[3]

It would be a mistake to apply only an Eastern lens to the viewing of Metcalf's work, since it is replete with Western references—visual, architectural, conceptual, cultural, mythic, and moral—that must be read by the viewer to gain the work's full meaning. But its concentrated qualities, its forays into the psychic hinterlands, and its passionate craft come from a different hemisphere, whether geocultural or purely mental. As this exhibition and catalogue demonstrate, Metcalf successfully plies these strands with their opposite twists in his Miniature Worlds, which, kinks and all, compel us to imagine the story beyond the silent image.

Kate Dobbs Ariail is a cultural critic in Durham, NC, and writes on the visual and performing arts throughout the Southeast.

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1. Joe Earle, *Netsuke: Fantasy and Reality in Japanese Miniature Sculpture*. Boston: MFA Publications, 2001), pp. 17–21.
2. Hollis Goodall, et al, *The Raymond and Frances Bushell Collection of Netsuke: A Legacy at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2003), p. 392, cat. no. 617.
3. Robert O. Kinsey, *Contemporary Netsuke: Miniature Sculpture from Japan and Beyond* (Santa Ana, CA: Bowers Museum of Cultural Art, 1997), pp. 41–53.

Visionary, 1995
sterling silver, copper, brass, wood, paint, Plexiglas, painted wood, brass, silver, drawing on paper
stage 7 x 4 x 2 ¼"
COLLECTION OF SUSAN BEECH

Wendy Ramshaw: Drawings in Gold

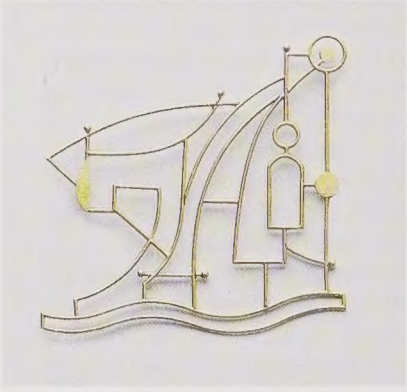
Lesley Craze Gallery, Clerkenwell Green, London
November 11–29, 2008

by Deirdre O'Day

Wendy Ramshaw's collection "Drawings in Gold" is described by the artist in the exhibition catalogue as "a series of drawings which have been transformed into gold jewellery." The 30 delicate pieces, dating from 2006 to 2008 and composed of 18k gold wire, are indeed sketch-like, but highly finished and as finely wrought as the pencil lines of drawings illustrated beside them in the catalogue. The largest of the pieces is a brooch of about 3 ½ inches and the smallest an earring of 1 ½ inches. The brooches, necklaces, and earrings are left largely undecorated, with the exception of minute knobs and arrowheads that act as links and terminals to the passage of a line. Occasionally a disc or oblong sliver of matte gold floats on the surface of the piece itself.

In the catalogue, which celebrates Ramshaw's 40-year career, Margot Coatts observes that the artist's "unequivocal three-dimensional statements work equally well worn on the body or sited in buildings and gardens"—a reference to the breadth of Ramshaw's production, encompassing as it does numerous public and private architectural projects, and her mastery over such differentials in scale. The catalogue lists almost two dozen such commissions, ranging from decorative door handles and etched glass doors, to screens, gates, and stainless steel towers, among them the New Edinburgh Gate, in progress for London's Hyde Park, and her steel and optical glass *Double Screen*,

WENDY RAMSHAW
City Plan (brooch), 2006
gold
2 3/8 x 2 3/3"



WENDY RAMSHAW
Standing Figure (brooch), 2008
gold
2 ½ x 2 ½"

commissioned by the Victoria & Albert Museum and soon to be prominently placed in its ground-floor galleries.

At this point Ramshaw has chosen contemplative, abstract forms in which to distill her ideas. An instinctive innovator, she continually challenged accepted modes of expression, always experimenting with new materials, exploring ways of interpreting jewelry, and expanding the role of the jeweler as artist. In 1964 she used screen-printed Perspex for her "Optik" fashion jewelry inspired by Op Art, and also created a range of popular self-assembly paper pieces. Later she uncoupled the direct association of jewelry with the body by placing multiple rings and earrings on turned cylindrical stands to create discrete sculptural objects. More recently, with her *Prospero's Dream* and *Wall of Dreams* installations, she has explored the use of jewelry in the context of a larger art object.

Within the formal abstraction of "Drawings in Gold," Ramshaw's controlled use of line is paramount; and she herself calls attention to the significance of each pencil stroke in a drawing for a brooch, on which she has written "note curve" alongside the subtle curvature of one of the lines. Although all of these exquisite little jewels are abstract in form, only a few such as the *Containment* necklace or the *Metamorph* chain are purely abstract in concept. Most often they are abstractions of recognizable entities, such as the brooches *Home and Garden* and *City Plan*, which can be interpreted as notional architectural plans. Similarly, the flowing lines of the brooch *Standing Figure* are identifiable as a human form, as are the simple botanical shapes of *Leaf and Garden* brooch. The blurred effect of the *Double Image* brooch is more literal, with its off-center superimposition of one image upon its mate below.

Underlying much of this series is a vein of playful wit that can found throughout Ramshaw's work: in the rhythmic lines of the *Fandango*, the soaring peaks of *Performance*, and the undulating curves of the *Swimmer* brooch. The influence of Paul Klee, one of the painters whom Ramshaw most admires, is also evident in the boldness of her work's conception, its concentrated spareness, and its occasional jocularity.

In her statement's closing words, Ramshaw draws our attention to the hidden potential in these small drawings for large-scale re-creation, where "an entirely different relationship to the human body will be seen and a different transformation will have taken place."

Deirdre O'Day, formerly a curator at the Victoria & Albert Museum, is a writer on art and jewelry.

Margaux Lange

Facèré Gallery, Seattle
March 4–25, 2009

by Judy Wagonfeld

For Barbie's fiftieth birthday, Margaux Lange bestowed upon her the best gift ever: nipples. Poor Barbie had survived since 1959 without them. Her perky bosom, swaddled in pointed and padded bras, concealed her lack of breastfeeding bumps. Even when Sixties bra burners exposed nature to a shocked nation, Barbie remained smooth.

That omission bothered Lange, whose love affair with Barbie began at four years old. The Plastic Princess fueled Lange's creativity and allowed her (as well as millions of other girls) to try on adult behaviors. But, rather than evolving into a country club blonde, Lange became a feminist at age 15, refusing to shave her legs.

Now, at 30, Lange's feminist passions meld with accomplished metal work in her "Plastic Body Series," an exploration initiated after she graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Arts in 2001. In the newest iteration at Seattle's Facèré Gallery, Lange refines her one-off statements into sophisticated shapes that no longer shout, "Barbie parts." Previously dismembered arms, legs, ears, and other appendages, stored in her studio like the disarticulated bones stacked beneath a desert monastery, have been featured in body part reliquaries. Hands dangle from hammered silver-cuff earrings. Pouting mouths, sequestered in etched metal bezels, clump en masse as a pendant. Clearly recognizable and clever, these pieces sell well in Lange's production line. Not a bad thing for an artist, but it's her less obvious handcrafted studio pieces that reap lasting art appeal.

The exhibit's most intriguing works obscure Barbie's fragments within constructions that speak to larger cultural concepts. In *Busted Heart Pendant*, five oxidized sterling hearts merge, points facing inward. The resultant central negative star might represent Venus, the goddess of love. Alternatively viewed as a five-petal flower, it symbolizes femininity and the fragile quality of childhood or life itself. The heart, worn in the form of lockets since

MARGAUX LANGE
Busted Heart Pendant, 2005
sterling silver, plastic doll parts, resin
4 ½ x 4 ½"
PHOTO: QUAD GRAPHICS

MARGAUX LANGE
Smiley Necklace, 2008
sterling silver, plastic doll parts, resin
3 x 5 ½"
PHOTO: MARGAUX LANGE

the Victorian era, serves as an icon for love and soul, and, like Lange's hearts, often held remnants of the deceased. On closer inspection, one realizes that each heart envelops a Barbie bosom appointed with silver nipples, completing Lange's tribute to keepsakes, romance, and women.

Blue Eye Clover Necklace encases shimmering blue eyes set in the leaves of sterling four-leaf clovers. Historically, the eye represents omniscience, the wisdom and intuitive sense of women. The clover suggests good luck without identifying the eyes as Barbie's. Lange achieves such complexity through skilled repoussé, chasing, scribe-drawn lines, and hammering of silver that yields precision bumps, lines, and polka dots. Resin was added to her retinue after a Haystack Mountain School of Crafts workshop.

When Barbie arrived in 1959, as the blonde bombshell-Miss America model, she all but replaced baby dolls. Lange likes that girls could play-act beyond motherhood, fathoming roles once options only for men. She acknowledges critics who claim that Barbie stands at the root of problems such as anorexia and scapegoating. It amuses her that Barbie, a plaything to accessorize, becomes an accessory in her work: one that's recycled rather than tossed.

Wearing Lange's jewelry hails to carefree, experimental days. However, women (and some men) don it as a confrontational adornment, eliciting reactions from delight to anger. For Lange, the jewelry evokes ambivalence between embracing and rejecting feminism, something she sees as a quandary for women. Barbie constrained in metal serves as a metaphor for females in society. Despite growing up in an era of choice, Lange believes women remain tied to standards of beauty and behavior. Lange's subtle new works create tension that elevates the art from memories of play to social commentary—a path worth continuing.

Judy Wagonfeld is a freelance writer who covers art, travel, food, and people for diverse publications.

Jennifer Trask: Unnatural Histories — Flourish

Mobilia Gallery,
Cambridge, Massachusetts
December 2008–February 20, 2009

by Patricia Harris and David Lyon

Jennifer Trask's new "Flourish" pieces share the preternatural vigor of the fairytale legume in *Jack and the Beanstalk*. The works seem to have grown with wild and weedy abandon—as if Trask went to bed one night with bracelets on her bench and awoke to find necklaces tumbling down to the floor.

Trask made her bones as a master of pocket magic. Her amulets containing pigments, earths, minerals, seeds, or feathers were sealed caches of power substances. Her work in "Unnatural Histories" (of which "Flourish" is the second sub-series) instead turns outward. Trask may work with inert materials, but she taps the biological imperative toward growth and elaboration. No wonder she calls the group "Flourish."

"Unnatural Histories" begins with the conceit of hybrid life forms: biomorphic objects that blur the taxonomic lines among animal, vegetable, and mineral. "Flourish" takes boundary transgression a step farther by subjugating the wearable jewelry object to the greater gestalt of its presentation in a framed box that is a work of art in itself. The frame is generally embellished with forms and backed by a panel with a two-dimensional rendering of the image's floral or vegetable origin. As if to underscore their vitality, some jewelry objects spill out of their frames, like children growing out of last fall's clothes.

Vulgaris (Wheat) illustrates Trask's approach, featuring a brooch of rose gold and moonstones with carved bone seed heads. Stunning on its own, it comes to life in its steel frame set with moonstones and Japanese beetles—the perfect gem substitute—on a background of a two-dimensional rendering of wheat. In a similar vein, the delicate flowering form of *Corona Imperialis*, with petite drops of rose-cut champagne diamonds, is suddenly transformed on its encaustic panel into a tenacious stalked plant with the insistence of an invasive weed.

Biotic paradox charges these pieces with energy. Bone and teeth meet metal and stone in vegetative forms. Just as Trask's amulets always resembled specimen boxes from a mineralogical museum, the more fully imagined presentation of the "Flourish" series echoes displays of a natural history museum—as if scientific presentation confirms the veracity of the artistic chimera. The combination of field notes and carefully crafted two-dimensional renderings makes Trask's trans-species fantasies compellingly real.

JENNIFER TRASK
Xenograft, 2008
framed encaustic panel set with carnelian and removable brooch
brooch: 18k and 22k gold, found bone, carnelian
frame: 9 ¾ x 10"

JENNIFER TRASK
Corona Imperialis, 2008
framed encaustic panel set with diamonds, oxidized silver, and removable brooch
brooch: palladium, 22k gold, pre-ban ivory, bone, salvaged diamonds, watch hands
frame: 11 x 11"
brooch: 4 x 4"

Trask's works are meant to astound and delight, and they achieve both aims. *Vertebrae Vine*, for example, circles the wearer's neck and lies flat on the clavicles; its floral clusters are largely composed of snake vertebrae. To have simply strung the vertebrae together to recreate the snake's backbone would have been interesting enough—a circle of bone on bone—but by transforming the small bones into flowers, Trask causes the piece to cross over from animal to vegetable.

Perhaps the most explicit "Flourish" piece is *Xenograft*, referring to a graft of material in which donor and recipient are different species. A gold branch with cabochon-set carnelians grows straight out of a piece of deer bone with lovely natural detail. The blunt juxtaposition makes its point in a single bold stroke. In other pieces, she uses bone or ivory as a material to represent such vegetative forms as seedpods or flowers—a more subtle approach to the radical cross-species content.

In her statement for the exhibition, Trask avers that she does not harvest or abet the harvest of the bone and ivory in her work—it's all found material or pre-ban ivory that she refashions. Likewise, the gold and palladium frame parts are all recycled. This self-conscious environmentalism is a clue to the ecstatic vision driving this work: the unity of the natural world.

Trask both mimics nature's endless recycling of material and employs a vocabulary of forms she observes in the macroscopic and microscopic natural world. By imagining "what if," she has created complex organisms that go beyond nature's own. May they live long and flourish.

Patricia Harris and David Lyon are writers based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Timothy Information Limited: Demonstration 2

Velvet da Vinci, San Francisco
February 1–28, 2009

by Jennifer Cross Gans

Imagine you are part of a demonstration, cause unknown, filled with the usual suspects: the dedicated, the angry, the bored, the naive, kids receiving an education on democracy in action, and people just wanting to have a nice day. What badge or bauble would best capture the flavor of the event?

In the true spirit of Monty Python, the British artist calling himself Timothy Information Limited recently produced a wild, wacky, thoughtful, and brilliantly crafted exhibition of 39 pieces with something for everyone. There is a joyous theme of "up against the system," leavened with other serious social and environmental issues, all executed with superb fabrication, engineering, and attention to detail.

This is a conceptual show with a punch, in more than ways than one. For the unashamed radical, there is a pin with a propeller, saying, "fuck capitalism." For the secretly destructive, there's a small container for ink or paint, which wouldn't go far in a real demonstration but *would* leave an indelible stain on your shirt. For the firebug at heart, there is a miniature furnace that could actually heat incense or another substance of your choice, and probably leave a burn mark.

Not all the pieces are quite so aggressive. For the insecure romantic, there's a circular brooch ornamented with a tiny arm—actually a digitally shrunk miniature of the artist's own—holding a bouquet of flowers. The gesture is ambiguous: Uncertainty? Shyness? Defiance or exuberance? For the metal artist, there is a round pin with a tiny swinging hammer. For the child in us, a wee cuckoo clock opens to reveal a colorful little bird of unknown species. For the responsible demonstrator, cleaning up the litter inevitably left by public events, a blue box-shaped pin contains a miniature broom.

The artist hints of other concerns, including the reality that demonstrations (like life) are ephemeral.

Several of the pieces here don't actually look very new, but have a slightly worn, distressed appearance. Others will follow suit if you wear them enough—like the swinging hammer, which will in time mark its circular mount.

All of the pieces are kinetic, designed for people who like to play with their art while wearing it. The propeller on the radical's pin spins when you twirl it. The cuckoo clock opens, as does the oven door on the furnace. Several use magnets, allowing the shapes and colors to be rearranged at will. Many have miniature handles, gears, and pulleys: all the mechanisms are perfect. Others are indirectly kinetic, relying on the motion of the wearer to chime, jingle, or sway.

A number of the artist's pieces also contain surprises, only revealed if the work is pried open. This is not recommended: says the artist, "You will lose years of enjoyment if you find out what is inside." Unlike the Christmas cracker, which opens with a bang and contains something you don't usually want, this work promises something nice. In the case of the two give-away pins at his opening exhibition: small cardboard boxes inviting people to fuck capitalism, or not—one of the brass tacks in the collection anchoring the piece was actually gold.

While there is more than a whiff of magic hobby shop about this exhibition, the artist has hand fabricated practically everything, including the mechanisms, using mostly brass, copper, and steel. A series of plain, elegant circular hollow-form pins (again containing jingling balls) were made in powder-coated steel, reputedly both durable and environmentally friendly. By contrast, a few others have a bright chrome finish.

Timothy Information Limited's choice of subject, and his overt humor combined with laid-back skill, do not conceal that this is a formidable and unique artist. He certainly gives a fresh interpretation to social commentary: you can be serious yet playful, and give the audience lots to talk about.

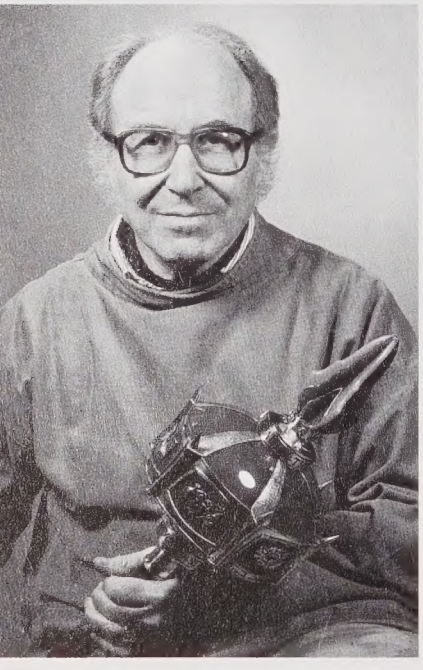
Jennifer Cross Gans is a writer and studio jeweler in San Francisco.

Unknown 33
(brooch), 2009
steel, paint,
magnets
2 ¾ x 2 ¾ x 1 ⅛"

Unknown 25 (brooch), 2009
brass, copper, sterling,
bristle, paint
2 ½ x 2 ¾ x 1 ⅛"

Kurt Matzdorf (1922–2008)

Lisa Gralnick
Metalsmith and professor, University of Wisconsin, Madison



Kurt Matzdorf, 1986, holding the SUNY New Paltz Mace he designed for the college
PHOTO: HEIG SHEKERJIAN

Kurt Matzdorf lived a life worth celebrating. It was, after all, a miraculous life that might have never made it past adolescence (his German parents sent him away to boarding school in England when the Nazis came to power, and he never saw them again) and one that unequivocally made a difference in the world. He has departed a world that is forever enriched and enhanced by his presence, and he left behind an impressive legacy: grateful and accomplished students (many, like myself, who became university professors), a distinguished university program at New Paltz that continues the tradition of rigorous education that was so important to his mission, and, finally, beautiful, cherished functional and ceremonial objects, mostly in silver and a quintessentially modernist style, used in homes, churches, synagogues, and public institutions. He also left behind a plethora of friends (after the death of his beloved wife Alice, he found love again in his eighties), family, students, and colleagues who admired and loved him.

I have often thought, throughout the years of my own career as a university professor, that my hope would be that at least one former student would feel something close to what I feel about Kurt Matzdorf. I was a graduate student of Kurt's 30 years ago, and it occurs to me now that he was approximately the same age when I became his student as I am today. The fifties are watershed years, when one feels wise enough to actually have something to teach but not quite old enough to feel out of touch and irrelevant. I realize only now that I was lucky enough to study with Kurt during those most golden years of his career. I owe my entire professional life to Kurt Matzdorf. He was not only an extraordinarily gifted educator and consummate silversmith, but also a role model on every level. He was a scholar and a gentleman, a man of integrity and deep moral conviction, a German Jewish survivor for whom the gift of life was never taken for granted, and a man for whom history provided the road map to the future. He believed in teaching metalsmithing not as a hobby or a vocation but as a practice, supported by the canon of art history and the inquisitiveness of intellectual pursuit. He became for me, in those tender years of graduate school, the demanding but loving father figure: always chiding me for my stubbornness and self-righteousness (he told my mother on the occasion of my MFA show that I was the most difficult student he had ever taught), but then turning around and doing something so profoundly nurturing that I wanted to throw my arms around him and sob. In those days, our classes began at 7:45 AM, and usually I had been in the studio all night when Kurt arrived for class. He always knew I hadn't slept because I'd get these dark circles under my eyes, "raccoon eyes" he'd call them, and he would order me home to sleep. Sometimes he would drive me home after class and then, once we were in his car, he'd ask if I'd eaten. If not, he'd insist on taking me to the diner for breakfast. Even all those years ago I knew that I had found someone who would be, for me, far more than a mere teacher—he would be a mentor, a champion, a friend, a model of how to be in the world, and an individual capable of that most complex of emotions—love.

The death of one's beloved teacher is a defining moment of adulthood. One realizes the enormity of the gift bestowed by that mentor and the responsibility accompanying the stewardship of that gift. There are several generations of metalsmiths who owe their careers to Kurt Matzdorf, and we are testament to the enduring significance of his life's work. I know deep in my heart that the decision I made 32 years ago to study with Kurt Matzdorf was possibly the most important decision of my life. He will be with me forever.

John Cogswell
Metalsmith, author, and teacher, SUNY-New Paltz

I first met Kurt Matzdorf in the autumn of 1976. Straight out of rural upstate New York, the land of corn and cows, I was young man on a mission. I had determined that I wanted to become a silversmith, and my search of college programs led me to the metalsmithing program at State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz. Kurt had created this program more than a decade earlier, and, with his sure and steady guidance, had fashioned it into one of the finest programs of its kind in North America. I knew this was the program for me.

However, wanting something and getting it are two different things. I was well aware from my research that I faced one formidable challenge: Kurt Matzdorf.

On the day of our first meeting, I entered his small office. He rose, and we stood face to face. He looked me square in the eye, and said firmly, "My name is Kurt, and that's the way I am." I knew this was a test, a challenge to my resolve. Without a moment's hesitation, I responded, "This program is where I need to be, and I have come too far to turn back now." He studied me for a second, then smiled, shook my hand and said, "You'd better be ready to work!" From that moment on, we developed a close and deeply personal bond that lasted until his death this past December, 32 years later.

Kurt was my teacher, mentor, business associate, and friend. Though he had a reputation for inducing weak knees and speechlessness in students and faculty members alike, I never feared him. Rather, I esteemed and admired him. Kurt was like a good loaf of fresh bread, crusty on the outside, but full of warmth and goodness on the inside. It amazed me that so many seemed unable to see through his curmudgeonly façade (I always knew that he secretly relished the effect he had on some people). His seemingly frosty public persona was his means of separating the wheat from the chaff. He had all the time in the world for those who worked and listened, but had no time at all for those who didn't. If you couldn't stand the heat, you were expected to get out of the kitchen! He often quipped to me on the side, "They don't need a middle-aged friend, they need a teacher."

Kurt believed resolutely in his place in the historical continuum of metalsmithing. He tried to make all of us who studied under him understand that we are all links in a living chain that stretches from antiquity into the future. Stewards of our craft, we are responsible for preserving the lore we have been given, perhaps adding a little of our own, and then passing it on to the next generation. Kurt lived by this credo, and because of this resolve, his legacy to the world of metalsmithing is a plethora of well-trained, dedicated studio craftspeople, and educators who carry on the mission.

He was not only an extraordinarily gifted educator and consummate silversmith, but also a role model on every level.

Robert Ebendorf

Jeweler and professor, School of Art and Design, East Carolina University

I first met Kurt Matzdorf the winter of 1968 in Chicago. I was paired up with him as his roommate. A small group of metalsmiths had been invited by Phillip Morton to fly to Chicago for a meeting to discuss the potential of formally organizing what is now known as Society of North American Goldsmiths. I was the youngest person sitting at the table.

During this two-day discussion I had the wonderful opportunity to discuss with Kurt his feelings in reference to education, exhibitions, and historical pursuits to celebrate the long lineage of gold and silversmithing. In the evenings in our hotel room Kurt so graciously shared with me a portfolio of photographs of his creative work. It was my first introduction to Judaic silversmithing, an area of work that Kurt is well known for. I recall those evenings fondly. Three years later I was invited to come and join Kurt as the second faculty member in gold and silversmithing at SUNY-New Paltz. Kurt always humorously introduced us as the two Dorf brothers, Kurt and Bob, instead of our given last names Matzdorf and Ebendorf.

Kurt was a passionate teacher that had great wisdom and technical skills to share. Many of the students that he mentored during his many years at New Paltz are now major contributors to the field of metalsmithing. He was always willing to bring his classes together to discuss his latest project. He would have the work laid out step by step so that we could all better understand the formal execution of the objects.

Kurt was so very proud to be a founding member of SNAG. As a board member, he worked diligently to move the organization forward. He took great pride in being a part of history and honored the family of goldsmithing and silversmithing. His many fine objects for his temple became part of their celebratory services.

It was an honor for me to have the many years working with him, not only as a colleague, but as a friend. He has touched the lives of many and we will miss him dearly.

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Opening night Pin Swap at SNAG's 2009 conference in Philadelphia

RACHEL SHIMPOCK
Toast Bracelet Group, 2008

DAVINA ROMANSKY
Movement (Tea Pot), 2009

VINCENT PONTILLO
For Saraswati, 2007

SNAG Successful Conference in Philadelphia

More than 800 attendees had a rousing good time at *REVOLUTION*, SNAG's 2009 conference in May, co-chaired by Doug Bucci and Vickie Sedman. Thank you to Rio Grande, worldwide distributor of tools and equipment, for being the corporate sponsor of SNAG's annual conference for the fifth consecutive year. And our gratitude goes to Jewelers Mutual Insurance, Todd Reed, Inc., Etsy, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Helen Williams Drutt English, Kendall College of Art & Design of Ferris State University, Otto Frei, Bill Gangi/Multisensory Arts, and many others for their sponsorships of individual conference sessions.

Stanley Lechtzin Presented with SNAG Lifetime Achievement Award

On the opening day of the SNAG conference, Stanley Lechtzin became

Stanley Lechtzin, SNAG's 2009 Lifetime Achievement Award winner

the most recent recipient of the association's award for a lifetime of exceptional service and achievement in the jewelry and metalsmithing field. One of the founders of SNAG, Lechtzin is known worldwide for his pioneering and revolutionary work with digital technologies that continues to push the boundaries of the metals field. The award is an elegant sterling silver vessel created by SNAG member Cynthia Eid.

SNAG Educational Endowment Scholarship Recipients

The Educational Endowment Scholarships are SNAG's highest awards offered to college students. This year, scholarships were awarded to Vincent Pontillo, undergraduate student at State University New York, Buffalo; Davina Romansky, a graduate of Rochester Institute of Technology who is continuing her studies through Cleveland Institute of Art in Rome, Italy; and Rachel Shimpock, graduate of Long Beach City College who begins her graduate studies at San Diego State University in the fall. Two Honorable Mentions were also awarded: to Elliot Gaskin, undergraduate student at Academy of Art University, San Francisco; and to Andrew Kuebeck, graduate student at Indiana University, Bloomington.

SNAG Welcomes New Board Members

In May, Caroline Gore (studio metalsmith and educator, Western Michigan University) and Anika Smulovitz (educator, Boise State University) were elected by the SNAG membership to its Board of Directors. SNAG sincerely thanks outgoing board members Tina Rath, who will continue to serve on the Exhibitions Planning Committee, and Kristin Lora, who leaves to join a solar energy startup venture with Tom Joyce.

SNAG's newly elected board members Anika Smulovitz and Caroline Gore

SNAG Members' Showcase

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Sue Ann Dorman
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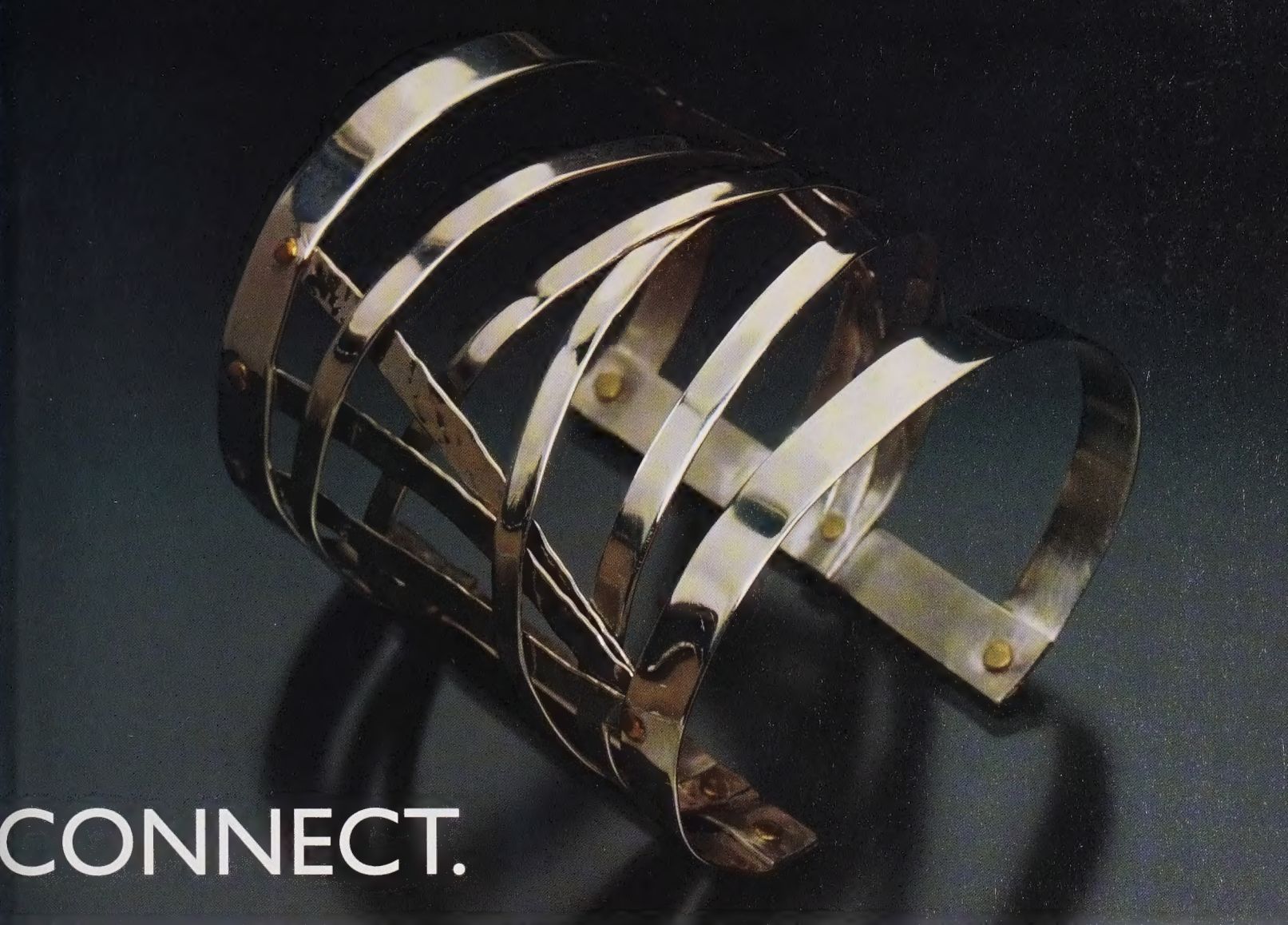

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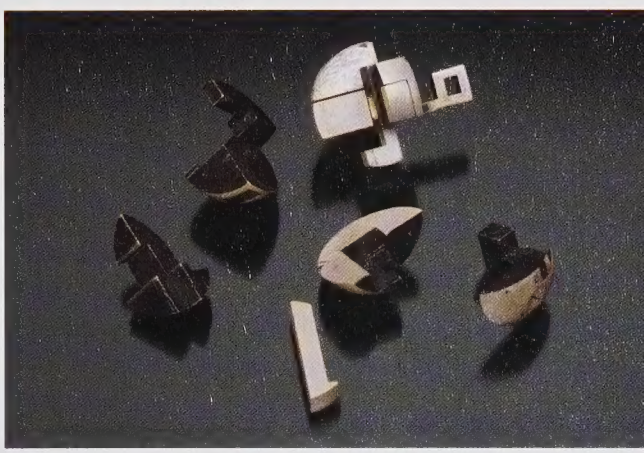

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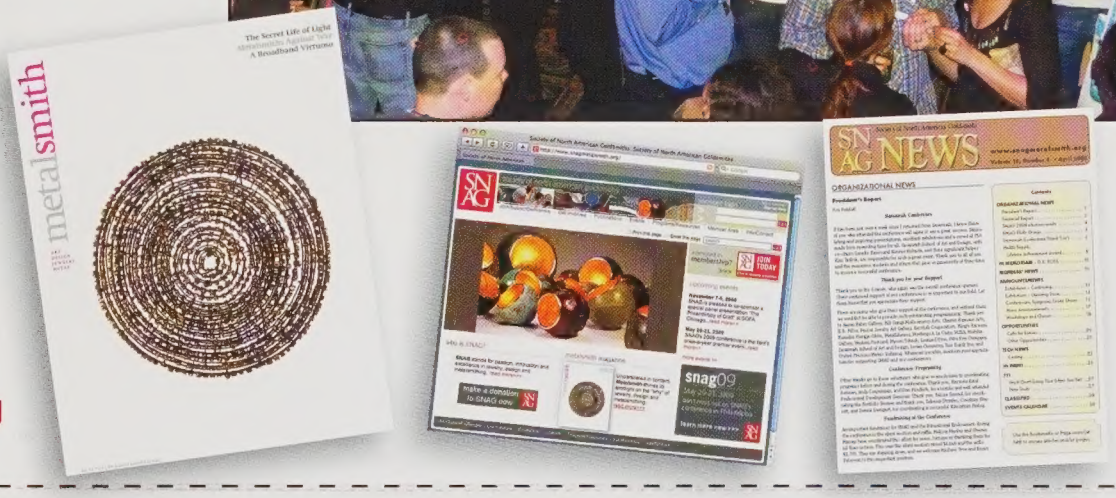

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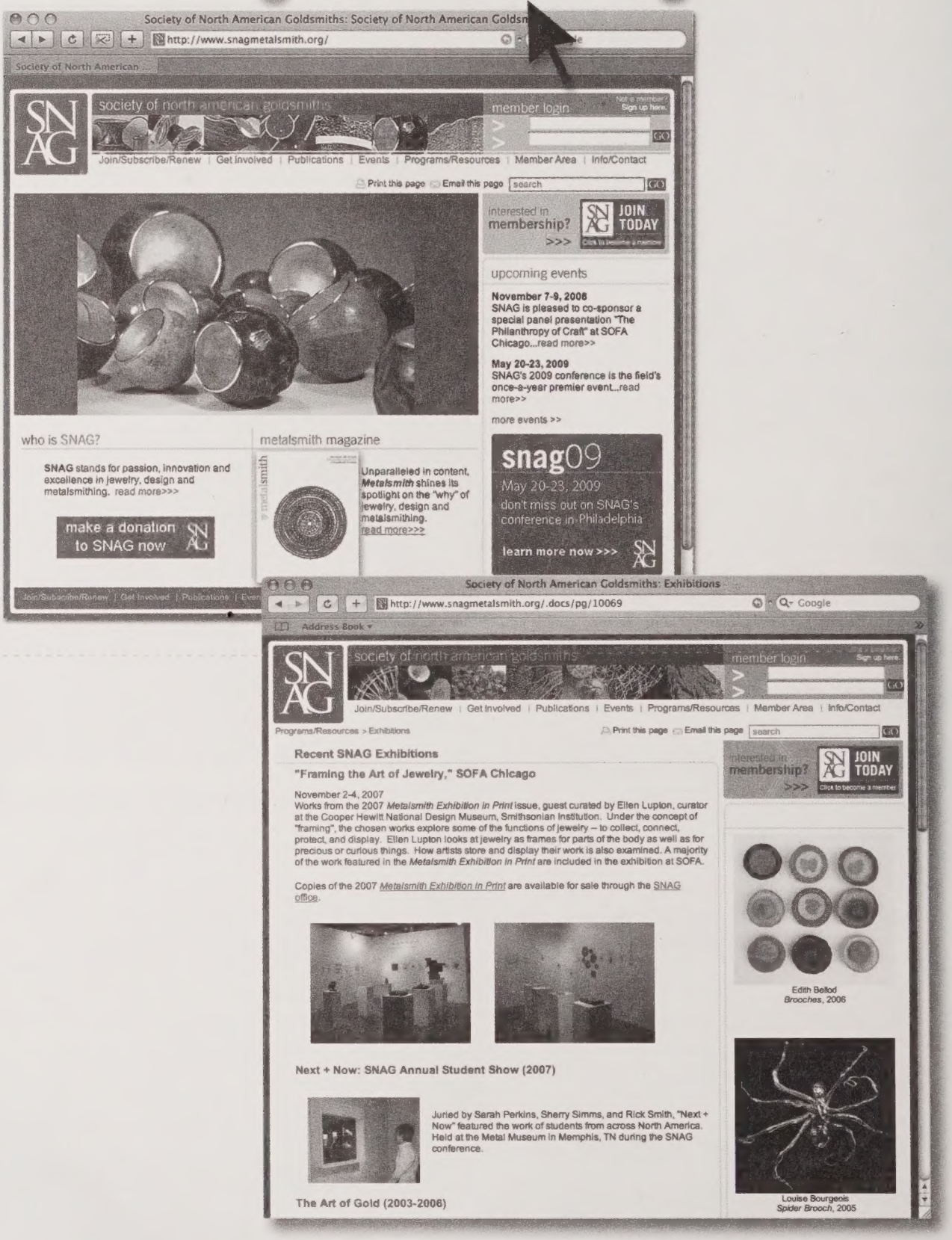
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Recent SNAG Exhibitions
"Framing the Art of Jewelry," SOFA Chicago
November 2-4, 2007
Works from the 2007 Metalsmith Exhibition in Print issue, guest curated by Ellen Lupton, curator at the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution. Under the concept of "framing", the chosen works explore some of the functions of jewelry – to collect, connect, protect, and display. Ellen Lupton looks at jewelry as frames for parts of the body as well as for precious or curious things. How artists store and display their work is also examined. A majority of the work featured in the Metalsmith Exhibition in Print are included in the exhibition at SOFA.
Copies of the 2007 Metalsmith Exhibition in Print are available for sale through the SNAG office.
Edith Bellod
Brooches, 2006
Next + Now: SNAG Annual Student Show (2007)
Juried by Sarah Perkins, Sherry Simms, and Rick Smith, "Next + Now" featured the work of students from across North America. Held at the Metal Museum in Memphis, TN during the SNAG conference.
Louise Bourgeois
Spider Brooch, 2005
The Art of Gold (2003-2006)

Cristina Dias
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image: *Norwood Viviano, faculty,* Tatted Lace Collar (detail)

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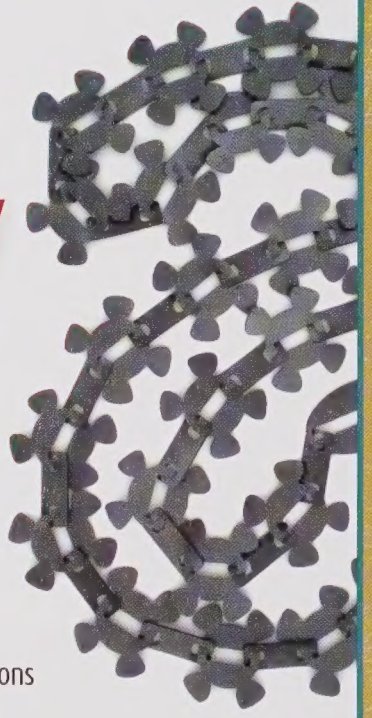

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Allyson Bone *Big Chain #2* (detail), 2009

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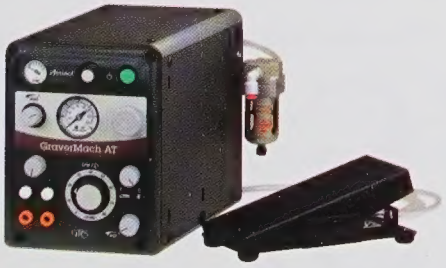

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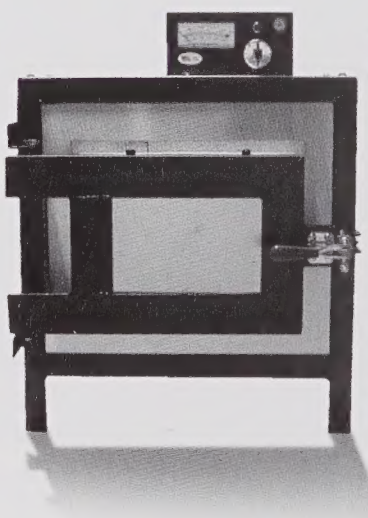

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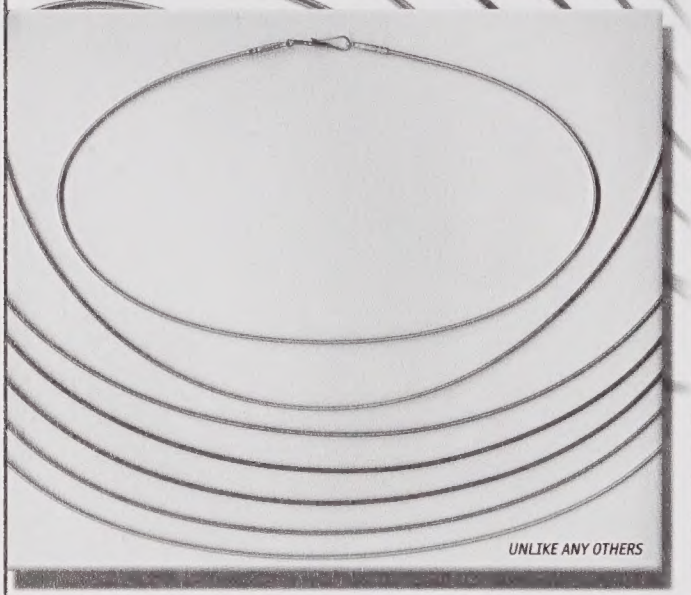

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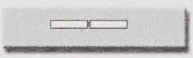
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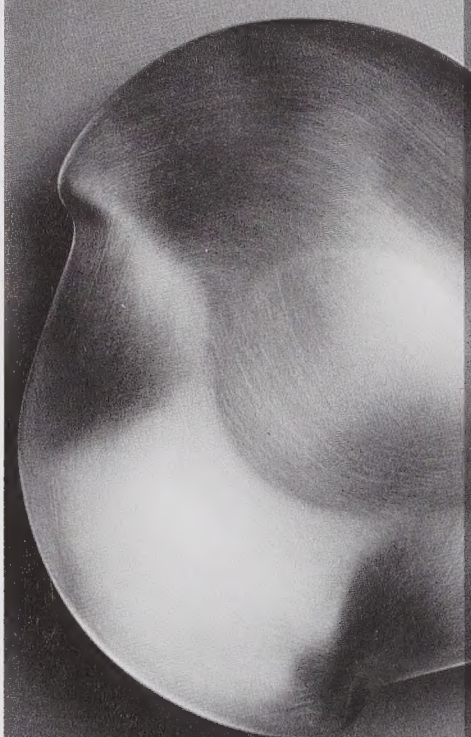

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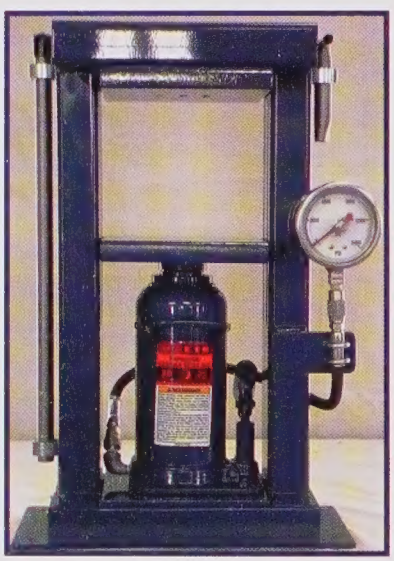

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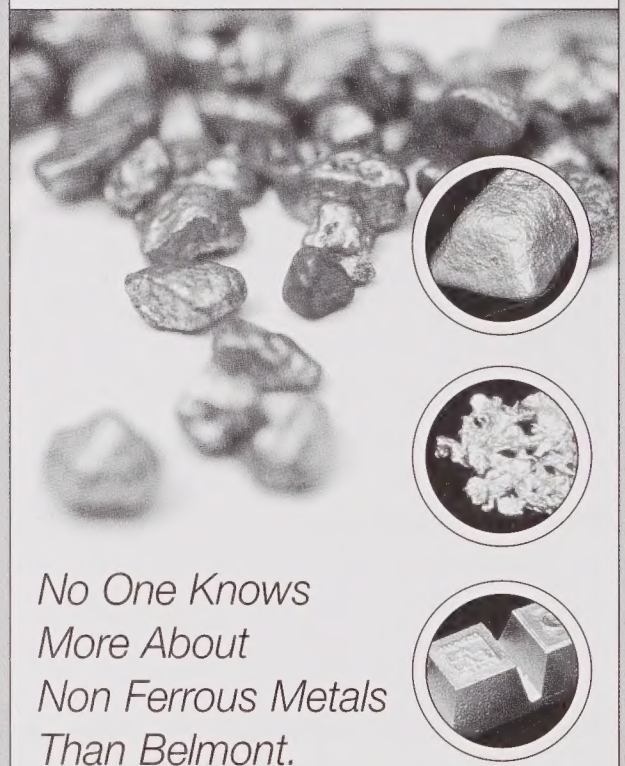

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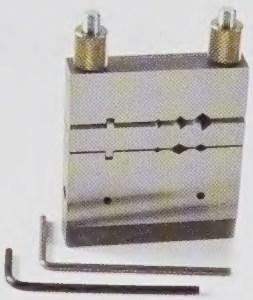

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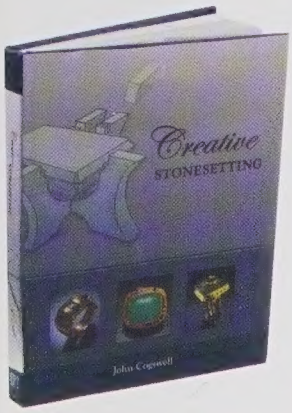

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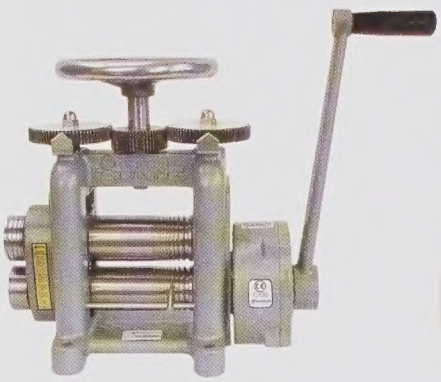

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Eugenia Spoon and Griffin Box Sterling Silver with 18k Gold accents
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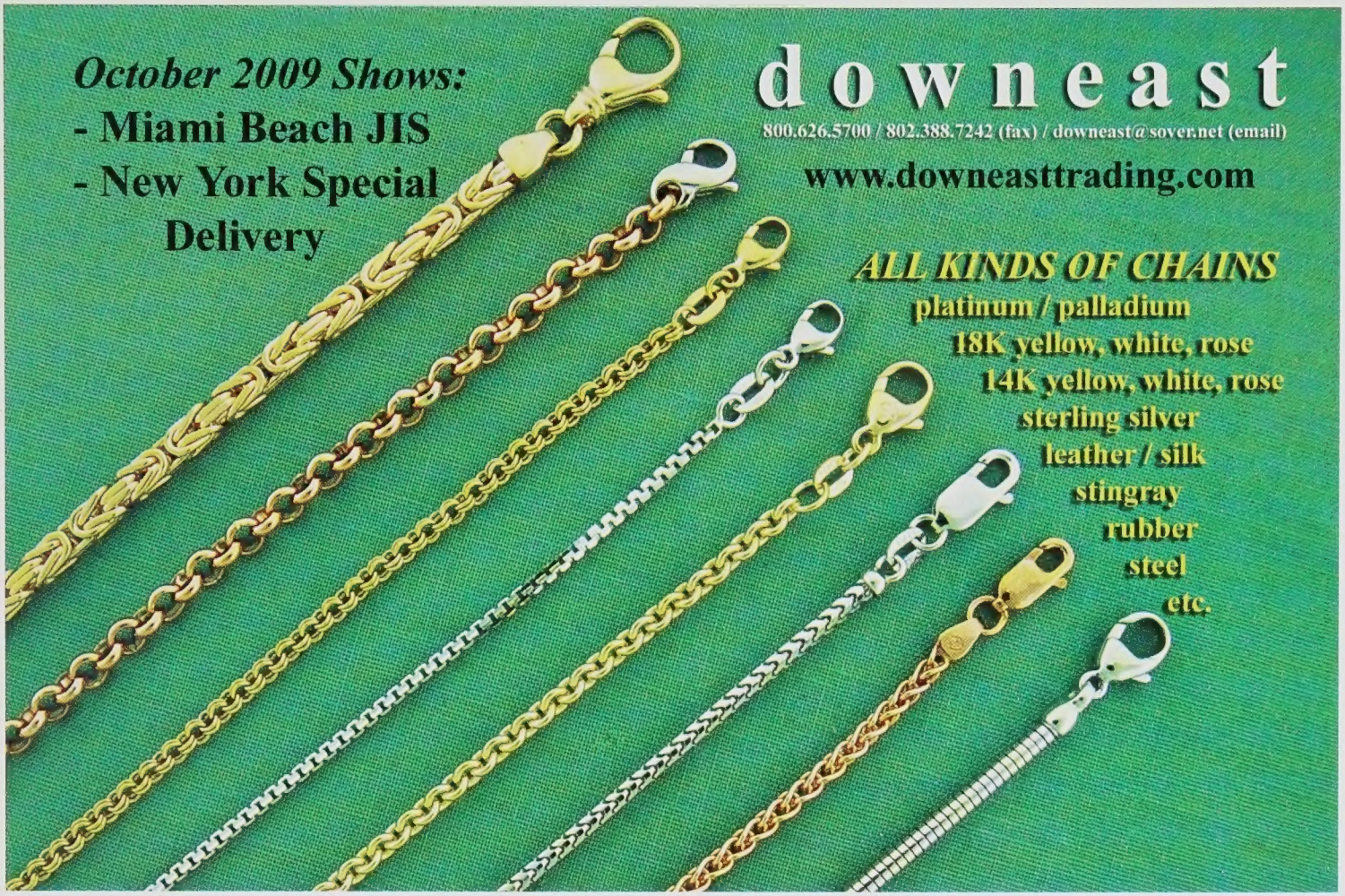
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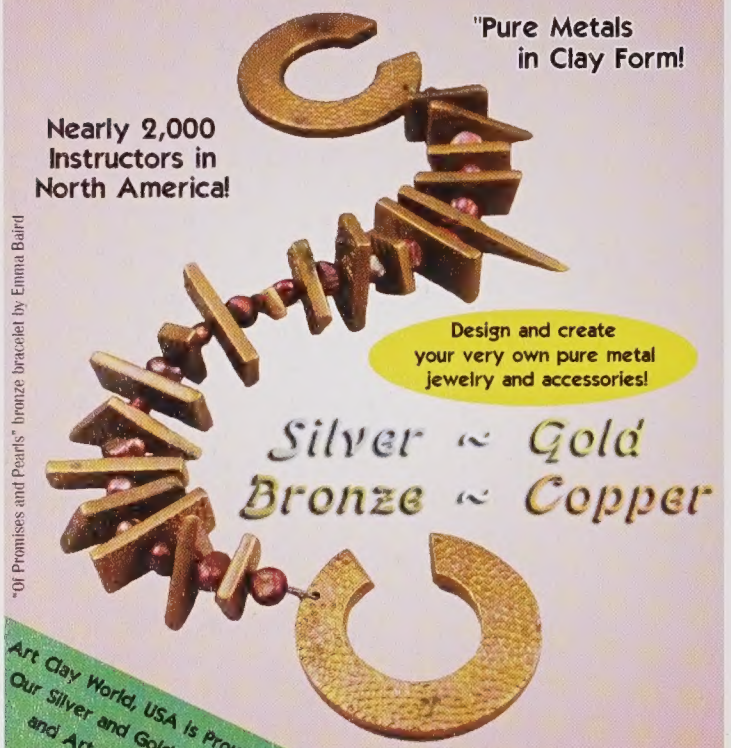

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